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Diego E. Machuca

Pyrrhonism Past and Present

Inquiry, Disagreement, Self-Knowledge, and Rationality

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To Camel, who's still around,
and in loving memory of Hund

Preface

The first work I read on Greek skepticism, back in 2000, was Victor Brochard's classic 1887 book, *Les sceptiques grecs*, a copy of which I found at the library of the Alliance Française de Buenos Aires. Since then, ancient Pyrrhonism and its relevance to contemporary philosophy has been the main focus of my research. In 2013, I came up with the idea of writing a monograph that would offer an interpretation of Sextus Empiricus's Pyrrhonism and explore certain issues in contemporary philosophy from a neo-Pyrrhonian perspective. I had already abandoned the project when, five years ago, Otávio Bueno asked me if I would be interested in preparing a proposal for a book on Pyrrhonian skepticism for the Synthese Library. I am therefore grateful to him both for the invitation and for approving the project. I hope that the present book lives up to his expectations.

Dale Chock read Chap. 1 and corrected some infelicities of style. Davide Fassio read an earlier version of Chap. 10 and raised a number of helpful objections. Although I have tried to address all of them, I suspect that he will remain unconvinced by much of what I say in that chapter. Mark Walker provided feedback on certain passages from Chaps. 2 and 5. An anonymous referee made useful comments on the whole manuscript. I owe special thanks to Otávio and the Springer editorial staff for their understanding and patience in the face of several delays. Having fallen prey to the so-called planning fallacy, I underestimated the time required to write the present book.

Earlier versions of parts of this work have appeared elsewhere, but I have thoroughly revised the already published material. Chapter 2 is an expanded version of "Can the Skeptic Search for Truth?," *Elenchos* 42 (2021). Some of the main ideas can already be found in "Ancient Skepticism: Pyrrhonism," *Philosophy Compass* 6 (2011) and "Pyrrhonism, Inquiry, and Rationality," *Elenchos* 34 (2013). Chapter 3 is a reworking of material from "Argumentative Persuasiveness in Ancient Pyrrhonism," *Méthexis* 22 (2009), "Again on Sextus on Persuasiveness and Equipollence," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 99 (2017), and "Pyrrhonian Argumentation: Therapy, Dialectic, and Inquiry," *Apeiron* 52 (2019). Chapter 4 partially draws on Machuca "The Pyrrhonian Argument from Possible Disagreement," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 93 (2011) and "Agrippan

Pyrrhonism and the Challenge of Disagreement," *Journal of Philosophical Research* 40 (2015). Some sections of Chap. 5 use material from "Pyrrhonism and the Law of Non-Contradiction," in D. Machuca (ed.), *Pyrrhonism in Ancient, Modern, and Contemporary Philosophy* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011), "Pyrrhonism, Inquiry, and Rationality," *Elenchos* 34 (2013), and "Scepticisme, *apraxia* et rationalité," in D. Machuca & S. Marchand (eds.), *Les raisons du doute: études sur le scepticisme antique* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2019). Some sections of Chap. 6 are based on "A Neo-Pyrrhonian Approach to the Epistemology of Disagreement," in D. Machuca (ed.), *Disagreement and Skepticism* (New York: Routledge, 2013). Chapter 7 is a revised and shortened version of "Personal Information as Symmetry Breaker in Disagreements," *Philosophy* 97 (2022). Chapter 9 is a substantially modified version of "A Neo-Pyrrhonian Response to the Disagreeing about Disagreement Argument," *Synthese* 194 (2017). Finally, the considerations about the epistemic and prudential value of Pyrrhonism in Chap. 11 draw on "Does Pyrrhonism Have Practical or Epistemic Value?," in G. Veltri, R. Haliva, S. Schmid & E. Spinelli (eds.), *Sceptical Paths* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2019). I am grateful to the editors and publishers for allowing me to use previously published material, and I reiterate my thanks to those who provided feedback on the above journal articles and book chapters, including Richard Bett, Luca Castagnoli, Nathan King, Markus Lammenranta, Stéphane Marchand, Mark McPherran, Emidio Spinelli, and several anonymous referees.

Parts of the material contained in this book were presented at conferences and colloquia that took place at the following universities and research centers: Center for Hellenic Studies (Harvard University), Durham University, École Normale Supérieure de Lyon, École Pratique des Hautes Études à la Sorbonne, Humboldt Universität zu Berlin, Johns Hopkins University, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies (Universität Hamburg), Northwestern University, Universidad de los Andes (Colombia), Universidad Nacional de General Sarmiento, Universidade de São Paulo, Universidade Federal da Bahia, Universidade Federal do Paraná, Université de Fribourg, Université Paris Nanterre, and University of Cambridge. I am grateful to the audiences at all these venues for engaging discussions.

Buenos Aires, Argentina
March 2021

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Chapter 1
The Motivation, the Approach, the Plan

Abstract In this chapter, I first suggest that a person's adoption or rejection of skepticism rests not only on his assessment of evidence and arguments, but also on his temperament and personality. I then argue that, given both the central part played by skepticism in the history of philosophy from antiquity to the present and the difficulty in pinpointing where skeptical arguments go wrong, skepticism cannot be dismissed out of hand as being obviously or intuitively false, absurd, incoherent, or unlivable. Next, I present the two aims of the book, namely, to offer a critical interpretation of some of the central aspects of Sextus Empiricus's skeptical outlook, and to take a Pyrrhonian approach to certain debates in contemporary philosophy. I conclude by explaining the layout of the rest of the book.

Keywords Emotions · Existential angst · Neo-Pyrrhonism · Psychological constitution · Radical skepticism · Rational reconstruction · Textual interpretation

1.1 Skepticism and Psychological Constitution

Our everyday experiences sometimes strike us as strange, bewildering, absurd, dreamlike, or surreal, and quite a few of us feel upset when we cannot find answers to the puzzles that arise from such experiences. The inability to find answers may be more unsettling to those who are inclined to engage in systematic reflection and who have the impression that there is something deeply baffling about the world, our existence, or the human mind. Such an epistemic failure may give rise to a feeling of existential angst and not merely to theoretical frustration. Existential angst affects a person's life more widely, shaping the manner in which he experiences his daily interactions with others and the world. A philosopher or a scientist may experience frustration on account of his failure to answer certain philosophical or scientific questions, without such a feeling extending to his life outside the study, the seminar room, the conference hall, or the laboratory. For that kind of failure does not necessarily have an impact on the manner in which he experiences life as a whole. Then again, theoretical frustration can engender existential angst when one takes the problems addressed in the above contexts to directly bear upon the ways

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in which one interacts with other people or the world more generally. What sometimes happens is that the existential angst experienced by some in their everyday lives prompts them to engage in a deeper and more systematic reflection that nonetheless does not provide them with any answers to their queries, let alone the desired answers, thereby generating a theoretical frustration that ends up intensifying the original angst.

Skeptics of various stripes can be regarded as digging deep into one or more of the perplexities that confront us in ordinary life, appreciating in full the seriousness of those perplexities and reporting that the results of their inquiries call into question (some of) our most cherished beliefs. Some skeptics claim to have found answers to the philosophical questions that grip them, but these answers are not of the kind that appeals to most people: there is no God, there is no afterlife, there are no objective moral values, our moral beliefs are epistemically unjustified, we cannot prove the existence of the external world, free will is an illusion, life is meaningless. Other skeptics, such as the Pyrrhonists, are agnostic and still looking for answers: their outlook is that of cautious suspension of judgment and ongoing open-minded inquiry. Now, are skeptics necessarily tormented or distressed? We cannot deny that what they take to be the (provisional) results of their inquiries may be deeply appalling to most people, including themselves. But there is no reason to think that skeptics inexorably experience existential angst. The ancient Pyrrhonists, for one, would be a clear example. On the basis of Sextus Empiricus's narrative of the Pyrrhonists' philosophical journey from dogmatism to skepticism, they could be interpreted as having experienced some sort of existential angst that prompted them to engage in philosophical investigation. But Sextus also reports that they unexpectedly attained a state of undisturbedness or peace of mind regarding matters of opinion after having suspended judgment about all the issues into which they had inquired up to that point.[1] Thus, the Pyrrhonists' suspension enabled them to get rid of the kind of angst or disturbance that had prompted them to embark on their philosophical journey. It is usually claimed that Sextus's story cannot be taken seriously. As far as I am concerned, I cannot *a priori* dismiss his story as false or insincere, even though the experience of suspension-based quietude is foreign to me.

My own philosophical stance can be described as a combination of existentialism and Pyrrhonian skepticism. Having first entertained the idea of pursuing a degree in engineering, in my last year of high school I decided to study philosophy. One of the reasons for my decision was the influence of Albert Camus, some of whose novels and plays I had read over the previous couple of years. Unsurprisingly, he was not part of the undergraduate curriculum. And despite both the strong identification I have always felt with some of the characters of his works and an uninterrupted interest in writers of an existentialist flavor, I have never devoted my research to so-called existentialism—except for two unimpressive non-academic pieces I published immediately after finishing college. My undergraduate thesis was on Descartes, and when I had to choose a topic for my application for a PhD

[1] I will return to Sextus's story of the proto-Pyrrhonist's conversion to skepticism in Chap. 2.

fellowship, I decided to work on Sextus Empiricus because, owing to circumstantial factors, I needed a topic in the area of ancient philosophy. Pyrrhonian skepticism was not part of the undergraduate curriculum either, so my choice was based on some sporadic references to Sextus in the secondary literature on Descartes and Hume.[2] Since then, my research has been focused primarily on Pyrrhonism, but also on skepticism in contemporary epistemology and ethics, and my approach is definitely much closer to analytic philosophy than to continental philosophy—to use a distinction that has of late been contested. Nonetheless, not only is it possible to identify similarities between Camus's stance and that of the Pyrrhonists,[3] but I have also come to the conclusion that for me Pyrrhonian skepticism embodies the bewilderment, ignorance, and uncertainty that I have always experienced regarding both mundane matters and more abstract issues, and that I have found in literary-cum-philosophical works of an existentialist flavor. I remember that one year after finishing my undergraduate degree, I came across a young psychologist whom I had met in college, and the first thing she told me was: "Are you still so skeptical?" Of course, she did not have in mind any technical sense of the term 'skeptical', but rather meant something like extremely or annoyingly incredulous or critical. Be that as it may, it does not seem to be an accident that I have been drawn to both existentialism and Pyrrhonism.

Why provide such dull autobiographical information? The reason is not (I hope) a narcissistic inclination, but the impression that it may help better understand both the motivation and the approach of the present book. An idea that has of late grown stronger in my mind is that quite a few of a person's fundamental choices are to be explained to a large extent by his psychological constitution,[4] in addition to his assessment of evidence and arguments. You may be thinking: "That's not precisely a mind-blowing discovery." Agreed. But that is something that philosophers usually forget, and hence something that they fail to take into account especially when dealing with the problem of disagreement. The reason why sometimes people do not come to agree on a given issue seems to be their different temperaments and personalities, which are shaped by their genetics, upbringing, education, socio-cultural background, life experiences, and the like. Why are some philosophers atheists, some agnostics, and some theists? Why are some contextualists while others are coherentists or foundationalists or infinitists? Why are some epistemic internalists and others epistemic externalists? Why are some moral error theorists but others robust moral realists? Perhaps because some have simply been able to see the truth and the others, for some more or less mysterious reason, have not. At least in certain

[2] I remember having in my hands, in my first or second year of college, one of the four volumes of the Loeb edition and translation of Sextus's works that a professor of mine lent me, but I do not remember why I asked her to lend me the book and, in any case, I must have read at most a few pages.

[3] On these similarities, see Lévy (2002).

[4] By 'psychological constitution' I mean a person's temperament and personality. The traditional view is that, whereas temperament traits are genetic and biological in nature, personality traits are acquired gradually through experience and are therefore a product of nurture rather than nature.

cases, this reply is however hard to swallow. Actually, what is hard to swallow is not so much the reply, but the view that one can confidently and justifiably determine who has been able to see the truth—if any there is. The discussions of disagreement, overconfidence, motivational and cognitive biases, introspection, and confabulation in the present book are intended to provide reasons why that view is not so easy to accept.

It therefore seems to me that whether one embraces or rejects skepticism is to a large extent a matter of temperament and personality. And this is so particularly when the debate between the skeptic and the non-skeptic reaches a stalemate, when the arguments pro and con are dialectically ineffective: perhaps they are dialectically ineffective because of a difference in temperament and personality. It might be argued that one such case of difference in psychological constitution concerns the pragmatic responses to skepticism.[5] Most people (laypersons and philosophers alike) are afraid of the potentially disturbing, appalling, subversive, or immoral implications of embracing one or another form of radical skepticism—the ground would crumble beneath their feet. They may be so psychologically constituted that their fear makes them reject skepticism despite their inability to pinpoint where skeptical arguments go wrong. Skeptics, by contrast, either are unafraid of such implications or, though afraid, control their fear and follow the argument wherever it might lead them. Consider also Peter van Inwagen's (1996) appeal to a philosophical insight that he enjoys but that is both denied to his opponents and incommunicable, or Alvin Plantinga's (2000) appeal to the *sensus divinitatis*. I cannot help thinking that, when they are involved in a disagreement with an epistemic peer who challenges some of their most cherished beliefs, the menace is so great that they prefer to have recourse to some mysterious cognitive act or capacity instead of following the argument where it leads them—the argument being a skeptical one that lays emphasis on the apparent epistemic symmetry between the contending parties and the need to suspend judgment. It is illuminating in this regard to compare Hilary Putnam's diagnosis of the source of Robert Nozick's rival view in political philosophy with Daniel Kahneman's description of the so-called affect heuristic:

> This is an extreme disagreement, and it is a disagreement in 'political philosophy' rather than merely a 'political disagreement'. […]
>
> What happens in such disagreements? When they are intelligently conducted on both sides, sometimes all that can happen is that one sensitively diagnoses and delineates the source of the disagreement. […]
>
> On the one hand, one recognizes and appreciates certain intellectual virtues of the highest importance: open-mindedness, willingness to consider reasons and arguments, the capacity to accept good criticisms, etc. But what of the fundamentals on which one cannot agree? It would be quite dishonest to pretend that one thinks there are no better and worse reasons and views *here*. […] Each of us regards the other as lacking, at this level, a certain kind of sensitivity and perception. To be perfectly honest, there is in each of us something akin to *contempt* […] for a certain complex of emotions and judgments in the other. (Putnam, 1981: 164–165)

[5] For discussion of some pragmatic responses to skepticism, see Machuca (2015: sect. 3; 2019: sect. 3).

> The dominance of conclusions over arguments is most pronounced where emotions are involved. The psychologist Paul Slovic has proposed an affect heuristic in which people let their likes and dislikes determine their beliefs about the world. Your political preference determines the arguments that you find compelling. If you like the current health policy, you believe its benefits are substantial and its costs more manageable than the costs of alternatives. If you are a hawk in your attitude toward other nations, you probably think they are relatively weak and likely to submit to your country's will. If you are a dove, you probably think they are strong and will not be easily coerced. Your emotional attitude to such things as irradiated food, red meat, nuclear power, tattoos, or motorcycles drives your beliefs about their benefits and their risks. If you dislike any of these things, you probably believe that its risks are high and its benefits negligible. (Kahneman, 2011: 103)

Kahneman does not maintain that a person's reasoning is always a slave of his emotions, but unlike Putnam he takes seriously the possibility that the views of *all* the parties to a political disagreement may actually be the result of mere preferences rather than arguments. Two caveats are in order. The first is that I am not affirming that Putnam cannot be right in his political views, but rather that, given that Nozick does not seem to be his epistemic inferior and that, to all appearances, they have both carefully examined each other's arguments and counterarguments, he had better not discount the possibility that their persistent disagreement is due to the influence, *on both of them*, of the affect heuristic or some other epistemically contaminating factor. Moreover, Putnam is aware that Nozick could make the same diagnosis of the source of Putnam's political views, which by my lights indicates that there is a dialectical-cum-epistemic symmetry between them.[6] Faced with such a situation, on what grounds can Putnam confidently and legitimately affirm that his own complex of emotions and judgments is the one to be preferred? It might be sensible for the time being to be cautious and suspend judgment both about what the cause of the disagreement is and about which political views are correct.[7] Perhaps Putnam's rejection of Nozick's position and his failure to take agnostic skepticism seriously are to be explained by his conviction that he has compelling arguments against both. But perhaps Nozick's and the skeptic's stances represent a serious threat to beliefs that are so cherished to him that he is unwilling to give them up no matter what.[8]

The second caveat is that I am not here adopting an extreme psychologism according to which philosophical choices are *entirely* a matter of one's psychological constitution, or according to which philosophical claims are *merely* expressions of one's temperament or personality. I am only remarking that there appear to be grounds for thinking that certain disagreements are ultimately to be explained as a clash of temperaments or personalities.[9] It could be argued that the disagreement

[6] I will have more to say about this kind of dialectical-cum-epistemic symmetry in Chaps. 6 and 7.

[7] Putnam had some knowledge of Sextus, whom he mentions twice (1981: 147, 162).

[8] There may also be a basic leaning towards skepticism and a basic leaning towards dogmatism (in the Pyrrhonian sense of this word, to be explained below) that has nothing to do with the various kinds of menace that radical skepticism is deemed to pose.

[9] When it comes to a clash of temperaments or personalities, perhaps the only way to reach agreement is through some sort of persuasion effected by 'speaking to' the other person's emotions and intuitions. Cf. Wittgenstein (1969: §§ 262, 609–612), Kuhn (1977: 338), and Haidt (2013: 56–58).

between the skeptic and the non-skeptic is one of those disagreements, and hence that the skeptic is forced to recognize that he is not entitled to affirm that his own stance is correct or justified. If this were the case, it would not be a problem for a skeptic of a Pyrrhonian stripe because he both acknowledges that he cannot discount such a possibility and refrains from affirming that his skepticism is correct or justified.

In partial connection with the foregoing remarks, one should bear in mind that a skeptic of any stripe may have certain character traits, dispositions, or habits that sometimes lead him to make claims that are incompatible with his skepticism. Still, at least on most occasions he will realize that he is making claims that he is not entitled to make because they are not supported by the epistemic reasons he currently has. For example, a skeptic who has deep-seated pessimistic or existentialist tendencies may in certain situations spontaneously affirm that life is absurd. By contrast, a skeptic who has entrenched optimistic or sanguine inclinations may in certain situations impulsively claim that bad things happen for a reason or that every problem has a solution. Despite the strength of the tendencies in question, the skeptic might be able to distance himself from them and tell himself that he does not actually have enough evidence to make those sorts of claims. Does that mean that he is inconsistent? It means that in certain situations he can be temporarily inconsistent, and that he is human, like the rest of us. But it also means that he is reflective enough to realize the epistemic status of the rash claims he spontaneously makes in everyday life and to immediately withdraw the assent he may have momentarily given to them. The skeptic's situation does not seem to be any different from that of most of us, who sometimes experience deep tensions between thoughtful views and automatic reactions—think, for instance, of the phenomenon of implicit bias.[10] It may be illuminating to appeal here to dual-process theories of cognition, so fashionable among cognitive psychologists. According to such theories, there are two information processing systems commonly called System 1 and System 2, or two types of cognition commonly called Type 1 and Type 2. Type 1 processing is fast, automatic, associative, implicit, involuntary, and requires little or no effort. Type 2 processing is slow, analytic, propositional, controlled, effortful, and one of its main functions is to override Type 1 processing. Consider the following remarks by Kahneman:

> System 1 continuously generates suggestions for System 2: impressions, intuitions, intentions, and feelings. If endorsed by System 2, impressions and intuitions turn into beliefs, and impulses turn into voluntary actions. (2011: 24)

> System 1 does not keep track of alternatives that it rejects, or even of the fact that there were alternatives. Conscious doubt is not in the repertoire of System 1; it requires maintaining incompatible interpretations in mind at the same time, which demands mental effort. Uncertainty and doubt are the domain of System 2. (2011: 80)

[10] I will briefly refer to implicit bias in Chap. 8.6.

> The moral is significant: when System 2 is otherwise engaged, we will believe almost anything. System 1 is gullible and biased to believe, System 2 is in charge of doubting and unbelieving, but System 2 is sometimes busy, and often lazy. (2011: 81)

> System 1 is not prone to doubt. It suppresses ambiguity and spontaneously constructs stories that are as coherent as possible. Unless the message is immediately negated, the associations that it evokes will spread as if the message were true. System 2 is capable of doubt, because it can maintain incompatible possibilities at the same time. However, sustaining doubt is harder work than sliding into certainty. (2011: 114)

In the case of the Pyrrhonian skeptic, we can understand his suspension as his System 2's resistance to his System 1's suggestions, a resistance that is motivated by his realizing that there are conflicting impressions or intuitions whose epistemic credentials appear to be on a par. But his suspending judgment does not of course mean that System 1 stops working and providing him with impressions or intuitions: things still inevitably appear to him in certain ways. Given that sustaining doubt is hard in that it requires mental effort, the Pyrrhonist must be on his guard not to inadvertently assent to impressions or intuitions whose epistemic standing is still in doubt.

1.2 Taking Skepticism Seriously

As noted in the previous section, my own stance is deeply influenced by Pyrrhonian skepticism, so much so that it can be described as a form of neo-Pyrrhonism.[11] In academia, self-identifying as a radical skeptic comes with risks, for the adoption of any form of skepticism that is not both narrow and innocuous to our most cherished beliefs is usually considered an intellectual or a moral sin. Radical skepticism of any stripe has a bad reputation because it is deemed to be the result of profound intellectual confusion or to have appalling and dangerous implications. On the one hand, most philosophers believe that any kind of sweeping epistemological skepticism,

[11] French and Italian scholars employ 'neo-Pyrrhonism' to refer to the outlooks of Aenesidemus (first century BCE) and Sextus (third century CE) to differentiate them from those of Pyrrho (360–270 BCE) and his disciple Timon (320–230 BCE). Anglophone scholars, by contrast, use 'neo-Pyrrhonism' to designate contemporary versions of Pyrrhonism. For them, talking about neo-Pyrrhonism will bring to mind Robert Fogelin's *Pyrrhonian Reflections on Knowledge and Justification* (1994). The explicit aim of his book is to offer an updated version of Pyrrhonism so as to make it applicable to contemporary debates about epistemic justification. In a nutshell, Fogelin's neo-Pyrrhonist is a moderate skeptic who does not attack our ordinary beliefs, who is not interested in the attainment of undisturbedness through suspension of judgment, and who does not make any use of the Ten Modes of Aenesidemus but only of the Five Modes of Agrippa. The present book and Fogelin's are markedly different not only because for the most part they address entirely different issues, but also because the present book is based on a close reading of Sextus's texts and makes a detailed and systematic application of the Pyrrhonian approach to each of the present-day philosophical debates to be explored.

such as Pyrrhonism,[12] should be dismissed out of hand because it is patently false, absurd, incoherent, or unlivable. As a result, it is usually thought that there are no real skeptics of the relevant kind, and that those poor souls who self-identify as skeptics are just confused or not very bright. On the other hand, some philosophers believe that, even though sweeping epistemological skepticism cannot be dismissed out of hand as patently false, absurd, incoherent, or unlivable, its moral, religious, and political implications are so pernicious that we should treat it as a dangerous virus whose spread should be prevented at all costs. This objection is also sometimes raised to forms of skepticism that target specific areas, such as moral and religious skepticism.[13]

Despite the bad reputation that any type of radical skepticism enjoys among academics, there are several reasons for confessing that I consider myself a neo-Pyrrhonist. First, Pyrrhonian skepticism is the outlook that best describes my own experience and state of mind. Second, it is far from clear that being a radical skeptic necessarily entails being immoral, impious, selfish, individualistic, politically subversive, or corrupt (see Machuca, 2019). Third, even if it did, that would not be problem for those who suspend judgment about whether anything is objectively right or wrong or for those who deny that anything is such. Fourth, given the myriad of eccentric and revisionary positions that have been proposed and defended by non-skeptical philosophers from antiquity to the present, I find it a little amusing to hear or read that skepticism (by which I henceforth mean radical skepticism) is to be rejected because it is counterintuitive or contrary to common sense. As Descartes points out in the second part of *Discourse on Method*: "on ne saurait rien imaginer de si étrange et si peu croyable, qu'il n'ait été dit par quelqu'un des philosophes" (AT VI 16, in Descartes, 1996).[14] Fifth, it seems that we should find the widespread disparaging and dismissive view of skepticism much more surprising than we in fact do if we simply attended to the part it has played in the history of philosophy up to the present. If skepticism is so patently false, absurd, incoherent, or unlivable, why have so many important historical figures engaged with it? Likewise, why are so

[12] As will become clear in later chapters, Pyrrhonism can be deemed a type of epistemological skepticism not because it is committed to, or based on, an epistemological theory, but because it calls into question whether our beliefs are epistemically justified. It might then be said that is a type of skepticism about epistemology, but this characterization restricts its scope inasmuch as the Pyrrhonist does not merely target 'the epistemological project' but extends across the board.

[13] In general, these forms of skepticism are not accused of being patently false, absurd, incoherent, or unlivable because, even though they are radical in that they call into question all of our beliefs in certain fundamental areas, their attack on the possibility of knowledge or justified belief is restricted to those areas.

[14] Examples that come to mind at the moment include Plato's so-called Theory of Ideas; the Neoplatonists' metaphysical cosmology; John Calvin's *sensus divinitatis*, which Plantinga (2000) thinks can produce warranted beliefs about God; van Inwagen's (1990) view that visible inanimate objects do not strictly speaking exist; Peter Unger's (1979a, b, c) theory that neither ordinary things nor human beings exist; and Paul Churchland's (1981) eliminative materialism, according to which mental states such as beliefs and desires do not exist. I am sure the reader can effortlessly think of his or her own examples of eccentric and revisionary non-skeptical philosophical positions.

many philosophers still today concerned with the problem of skepticism in different areas of philosophical inquiry? For example, systematic philosophers, and not only historians of philosophy, still engage with Sextus's surviving writings eighteen centuries later. I find it hard to believe that in all cases it is a matter of a merely methodological use of skepticism—at least some of the philosophers who engage with some form of skepticism explicitly or implicitly recognize that it cannot be dismissed out of hand but needs to be refuted. This brings me to the final reason: one may reasonably argue that non-skeptics owe us more than the claim that skepticism in its various forms is obviously or intuitively false, absurd, incoherent, or unlivable, namely, an explanation of how they have succeeded in refuting it (see Machuca, 2015: sect. 2). In the literature, one sometimes finds authors who have no qualms about writing passages such as the following:

> [I]n this age of post-Moorean modesty, many of us are inclined to doubt that philosophy is in possession of arguments that might genuinely serve to undermine what we ordinarily believe. It may perhaps be conceded that the arguments of the skeptic appear to be utterly compelling; but the Mooreans among us will hold that the very plausibility of our ordinary beliefs is reason enough for supposing that there *must* be something wrong in the skeptic's arguments, even if we are unable to say what it is. (Fine, 2001: 2)

> The sense in which the skeptic cannot win is not that he will inevitably fail to persuade us of his conclusion […]. Rather, the sense in which the skeptic cannot win is that it would never be reasonable to be persuaded by the skeptic's argument. Moreover, I think that this is something that we can know even in advance of attending to the specifics of the skeptic's argument: in a sense, the skeptic has lost before the game begins. I concede that it is not easy to see what distinguishes this stance from simple dogmatism (if anything does). (Kelly, 2005: 181)

> According to the kind of dogmatism presently under consideration, one can be justified in believing propositions even when one is not adept at playing defense. That is, one might be justified in believing a proposition even if one finds oneself unable to identify any objectionable premise or transition in the skeptic's attempt to provide a non-question-begging argument for the negation of that proposition. (Kelly, 2005: 204–205 n. 10)

> 1. Philosophical scepticism is, intuitively, false.
> 2. If the fact of disagreement alone always or nearly always required both sides in a dispute to suspend judgement, then […] philosophers would all have to adopt philosophical scepticism.
> C. Therefore it is not the case that the fact of disagreement alone always or nearly always requires both sides in a dispute to suspend judgement.
>
> Premise (2) requires no defence. It is generally hard to defend an 'intuitive claim' with a broad scope, such as the one expressed in premise (1), except to say that it 'just seems correct'. I am afraid all I can add at this point in defence of premise (1) is that it seems highly plausible to me, and that others in the literature […] are in agreement here. (Thune, 2010: 370)

There are cases in which one is probably justified in not taking into consideration the arguments for a given view because the view strikes one as intuitively false or as completely unreasonable, or because the opposite view strikes one as much more plausible or persuasive or convincing. In such cases, it would not be necessary to examine the premises and logical form of the arguments in question because one knows that their proponent has lost the dialectical game even before it begins. But

this maneuver seems illegitimate, or at the very least suspicious, when the view one dismisses out of hand is one in support of which one concedes that there are arguments that appear to be utterly compelling or whose alleged flaws one is unable to identify. This is particularly so in the context of philosophical debates, whose standards are supposed to be radically different from those in play in mundane discussions or in debates among uneducated or fanatic people. Philosophers who make a methodological use of skeptical arguments assume that the conclusions of these arguments are false. But they claim that engaging with skeptical arguments and determining where they go wrong can help us to construct accurate accounts of knowledge, justification, and evidence (e.g., Greco, 2000). The problem with which these philosophers are confronted is that it is no easy task to pinpoint where skeptical arguments go wrong and that there is considerable disagreement among them about where exactly the arguments go wrong. It is therefore probably too naïve or arrogant to claim that it is an incontestable fact that the conclusions of skeptical arguments are false and, hence, that the skeptics have lost the dialectical game even before it begins. We should also bear in mind that the above disagreement is grist for the skeptics' mill. They may gently tell their rivals:

> Please, first reach an agreement on the correct diagnosis of the flaws in our arguments, and then we might start taking seriously your view that the only use of our arguments worth making is methodological. For being as philosophically competent as you are, surely you will be able to reach a (nearly) unanimous verdict about where lie the illusions we have so cunningly created. Take all the time you need to figure it out, but in the meantime please let us take part in the dialectical game. We must also confess to you that we often wonder why since antiquity the various arguments we have constructed have been so carefully assessed by our opponents if there is actually no need to attend to their specifics in order to reject them.[15]

Despite the common emphasis on the allegedly appalling implications of adopting any form of skepticism, there may be a positive side to skepticism from the point of view of non-skeptics, since skeptical challenges or arguments are potentially humbling in that they may serve as correctives to our epistemic arrogance and complacency. Oftentimes, I have heard the idea that philosophers do not really advance their views with (great) confidence because they are aware of the serious difficulties they face. But on the basis of my experience with philosophers—attending their talks, reading their articles and books, and discussing with them—I get the impression that they do believe that, regarding their solutions to the problems they address, they have hit the nail on the head or at least landed close to the mark. And they

[15] I think that Richard Foley's remarks about epistemologists' attitude towards skeptical hypotheses can be applied to the discussion of any kind of radical skepticism: "The evil demon and the brain-in-the-vat hypotheses come in for special scorn as being too far-fetched to be worthy of attention. On the other hand, epistemologists are more drawn than ever to proving that skeptical hypotheses cannot possibly be correct. We belittle those who stop and gawk at gruesome accidents, but when we ourselves witness an accident, we too stop and gawk. We cannot help ourselves, it seems. So it is with epistemologists and skepticism. More and more epistemologists say that radical skeptical hypotheses are not worthy of serious philosophical attention, but at the same time more and more cannot help but try their hand at refuting them" (2001: 6).

believe so even if the problems they tackle have been the object of philosophical discussion for centuries, and even if those problems have been given solutions different from their own by persons who seem to be at least as intelligent, educated, unbiased, and intellectually honest as they take themselves to be. Of course, if one believes that one has indeed found the solution to a problem that has been the object of a longstanding debate, then the right thing to do is to say so and, if one is considerate enough, to enlighten all the interested parties by laying out the alleged solution. However, if one reflected more carefully and more humbly both on the fact that there exists an entrenched disagreement among intelligent and well-trained philosophers about how best to solve the problem in question and on how often oneself and others have held beliefs that were false or epistemically unjustified despite all appearances to the contrary, it seems that one should step back and proceed with more caution. This should be even more so if one got acquainted with the psychological literature on how often one overestimates one's cognitive capacities, on how often one confabulates, and on how often one is affected by various motivational and cognitive biases. It might be argued that 'the philosophical project' depends on people believing different views and defending them in the face of criticism. Such a doxastic commitment[16] is what makes it possible to come up with new ideas, conceptual distinctions, and arguments, and to consider as many solutions to a given problem as possible. In other words, such a practice is what enables us to undertake philosophical inquiry and move it forward. I wonder whether such a doxastic commitment ensures philosophical *progress* understood as the (continuous or discontinuous) approximation to the truth. Perhaps it ensures some progress, but not *substantive* progress, or perhaps it ensures substantive progress, but not substantive progress concerning the *big questions* of philosophy. As a neo-Pyrrhonist, I suspend judgment about all of that. But let me observe that, given that Pyrrhonian skeptics are not committed to any positions because as a matter of fact they find themselves unable to take sides in the deep-rooted and pervasive philosophical disagreements, they are perhaps better able to take account of the epistemic significance of such disagreements, of past failures, and of the empirical evidence of the massive influence of epistemically distorting factors on our judgments and decisions.

Contemporary discussions of skepticism mostly focus on arguments that conclude that we cannot know anything about the external world by appealing to peculiar scenarios or hypotheses involving dreams, evil demons, deceiving gods, brains in vats, or supercomputers. It could be argued that, in order to raise a serious challenge, the skeptic paradoxically needs to come up with ludicrous, fanciful, or farfetched hypotheses that have nothing to do with what we find in real life. The skeptic might reply by partially conceding that point and saying that the dream argument is not the same as the arguments that appeal to brains in vats or evil demons. For all of us have dreamed and at least many of us have sometimes had trouble discriminating dreaming from waking. But the skeptic could also argue that ordinary people

[16] In this book, I speak of "doxastic commitment" and "doxastic assent" to refer to the commitment or assent that implies holding the belief that that to which one is committed or gives one's assent is the case or is correct.

constantly make reference or have recourse to far-fetched or fanciful entities, powers, events, or connections, such as gods, the devil, angels, demons, ghosts, the predictive power of Tarot cards, the healing power of certain stones, miracles, Marian apparitions, divine providence, or the influence of the positions and movements of celestial bodies on earthly occurrences and human affairs. Given the widespread belief in gods or demons, skeptical scenarios that appeal to such entities are not actually unconnected with real life, even though in real life people do not usually think about those scenarios.[17] Moreover, a considerable number of smart and well-trained philosophers believe in some such things; even quite a few of them defend the rationality of some of those beliefs in their philosophical writings. Hence, if, for example, a Christian epistemologist is epistemically entitled to his belief in an omnipotent God, why would a skeptic be precluded from entertaining a certain possibility about such a God and constructing an argument thereon? Having said all that, I think that the skeptical arguments found in ancient Pyrrhonism may be more challenging than their contemporary counterparts. Consider the argument from disagreement: we are all faced with disagreements, disputes, or controversies in our daily lives, be they political, religious, moral, legal, historical, economic, or scientific in nature. Even if most of the time people feel confident that the disagreements in question can be easily resolved, they are at least aware that they pose some sort of challenge to their beliefs that should be met one way or another. Note also that even the so-called regress problem posed by Agrippa's trilemma does not seem far away from some of our natural epistemic practices: suffice it to have a talk with a child who keeps asking "Why?" until one becomes so exasperated that one replies "Just because," or to remember a situation from one's childhood in which one was not content with any of the answers one was given and kept posing questions.[18] Arguments that appeal to disagreement or the regress problem cannot, it seems, be dismissed as easily as the arguments that appeal to scenarios involving brains in vats, deceiving gods, or evil demons.

1.3 Aims and Approach

The focus and inspiration of the present book is the brand of Pyrrhonism expounded in the extant works of Sextus Empiricus, a skeptic already mentioned a couple of times in the preceding sections. Our main source for ancient Pyrrhonism, Sextus was a physician who according to some sources belonged to the Empirical school of medicine—hence the sobriquet 'Empiricus'—although he himself notes a fundamental difference between Pyrrhonism and medical Empiricism, and recognizes the strong affinities between the former and medical Methodism (*Pyrrhonian Outlines*

[17] Many people are aware of scenarios involving aliens, supercomputers, or dreams after seeing such movies as *Dark City*, *The Matrix* or *Inception*, or reading Jorge Luis Borges's short story "The Circular Ruins" or Pedro Calderón de la Barca's play *Life Is a Dream*.

[18] I will deal with the trilemma in Chap. 4.

I 236–241).[19] While he is usually placed in the second half of the second century CE, his *floruit* seems to have been in the early third century.[20]

The book has two aims. The first is to offer a critical interpretation of some of the central aspects of Sextus's skeptical outlook. The second is to examine certain debates in contemporary philosophy from a neo-Pyrrhonian perspective. The approach is therefore both exegetical—without falling into dusty antiquarianism or dull doxography—and systematic—without falling into arrogant anachronism. The book thus occupies a middle ground between straightforward textual interpretation and rational reconstruction—or at least so I intend, since achieving such a balance is no easy task. In the examination of Sextus's stance and in the application of the Pyrrhonian approach to contemporary debates, I will then often go beyond what is explicitly said in his texts and will tackle subjects that are not addressed therein. Nonetheless, I take the considerations I will make in so doing to be in line with the spirit of Pyrrhonism, since I draw on what I regard as its conceptual and argumentative resources. Of course, when studying a text, it is not always easy to determine whether a given view is to be ascribed to its author or is instead inspired by him or her—one may be just projecting one's own ideas onto the text.[21] It is equally difficult to determine whether the application of the author's stance to new issues or areas does justice to that stance or is incompatible with it. These are unavoidable difficulties with which interpreters are faced. But even if one is unable to (fully) overcome them, it is at least useful to be aware of them. The limit between what a text is saying and one's own views is particularly blurred and, hence, harder to demarcate with precision when one sympathizes with the stance expounded in the text in question.

My interpretation of Sextus is characterized by a 'deflationary' and 'psychological' reading of certain aspects of the Pyrrhonian outlook and practice, such as the inquiry into truth, the therapeutic use of arguments and its philanthropic motivation, the compliance with logical laws and requirements on justification, and the suspension of judgment about all the matters under investigation. I call it 'deflationary' and 'psychological' because I claim that with respect to none of those aspects does Sextus exhibit any kind of doxastic commitment, but rather a no-doxastic inclination or a constrained reaction that are to be explained by his mental constitution. My deflationary interpretation of Pyrrhonism extends also to the question of its epistemic and prudential value inasmuch as, in my view, the Pyrrhonist does not believe (or disbelieve) that his stance has either kind of value.[22]

This book is written in an exploratory mode, for my approach is that of an inquirer who recognizes his ignorance and is looking for answers. I am therefore an

[19] On Sextus's relationship with medical Empiricism, see Machuca (2008: 40–50).

[20] On Sextus's dates, see especially House (1980) and Jouanna (2009).

[21] This is something that not only systematic philosophers but also historians of philosophy sometimes forget. Think of those scholars of ancient philosophy who naïvely ascribe highly elaborate philosophical or scientific positions to such obscure figures as Anaximander, Heraclitus, or Parmenides.

[22] I address this issue in Chap. 11 and, more fully, in Machuca (2019).

onlooker on the debates that take place in philosophy, psychology, and ordinary life; an onlooker who expects from each party reasons why he should trust them rather than their rivals, and hence reasons on the basis of which he would in principle be able to adjudicate those debates. The type of inquirer in question takes into consideration as many views as possible on the topics under investigation, has recourse to anything from his own experience, upbringing, education, and professional training that might seem to be of relevance, and tries to avail himself of new research on those topics. He makes use of whatever tools or resources are available to him to see whether they will enable him to arrive at a discovery regarding any of the matters being investigated. He also thinks that the use of various kinds of argument in a dialectical manner is, given his doxastic situation, a plausible way to test the epistemic credentials of the views of those who claim to have found answers, to possess knowledge, to be experts, or to have justified beliefs.

Let me explain what I understand by a dialectical argument. It is an argument (1) that is employed in debate, be it oral or written and be it against a real (alive or dead) or imaginary opponent, (2) whose logical form is, or should be, recognized as valid by the opponent, and (3) to which its proponent is not committed inasmuch as he either denies or suspends judgment about its soundness. A proponent of such an argument can make use of (i) premises that he himself has come up with, or (ii) premises that are explicitly or implicitly accepted by the opponent with whom he is at present engaging inasmuch as they are borrowed from his opponent's own doctrine or follow from it, or (iii) premises that are taken from the doctrines of other opponents. A dialectical argument whose premises are of type (ii) is an *ad hominem* argument, which is an argument intended to show that the opponent's own position leads to a conclusion that is at variance with that very position. One can of course construct an argument only part of whose premises are explicitly or implicitly accepted by one's opponent, whereas the rest of its premises are either premises that one oneself has come up with or premises that are taken from the doctrine of some other opponent. Such an argument is partially *ad hominem*. Thus, I take it that in a dialectical argument there must be something that one's opponent accepts or should accept, but this need not be (some of) its premises; it may be only its logical form. The proponent of a dialectical argument that is not *ad hominem* still expects that his opponent will find the premises somewhat persuasive or plausible, but of course that may not occur.

Of a philosophy book, one expects that it contains at least a small number of theses or assertions advancing a view to which its author is fully or partially committed—even if provisionally. Although I do have a marked preference for Pyrrhonism because it is the outlook that best describes my own experience and state of mind, my aim in this book is not to convince you that Pyrrhonism is the correct or the most plausible philosophical stance, and hence that you should adopt it as your own philosophical stance. Rather, I intend both to better understand Sextan skepticism and to examine whether certain contemporary philosophical positions can survive careful scrutiny from a Pyrrhonian vantage point. But then a question arises: what is the point of writing this book if I am not committed to Pyrrhonism as a philosophical position that I believe others should embrace too? Also, why should

others be at all concerned with my personal preferences if I do not believe that they are the correct ones? Why should they care that my state of mind is that of being at a loss in the face of controversial or intricate issues, given that I do not claim, on the basis of what I take to be the correct standards, that others should find themselves in the same state of *aporia* regarding those issues? Similar questions can be asked about Sextus. Does the very fact that he wrote several works not reveal that he believed that he had something of objective value to communicate to others and that they should change their dogmatic minds? If he did not believe any of that, why should we be interested in his extant corpus as anything more than an invaluable source of information about the doctrines of ancient thinkers and schools? In other words, why should we care about Sextus the philosopher and not merely about Sextus the doxographer? In sum, we are faced with two questions: (i) why would a (neo-)Pyrrhonist bother to write a book? and (ii) what value, if any, would a reader find in reading such a book?

I will address the second question in the Coda (Chap. 11) because, by then, you will have read the nine chapters that make up the bulk of the book, thereby being able to assess the plausibility of my reply. With regard to the first question, the reasons may range from academic requirements to the intellectual pleasure some find in reflecting and debating on philosophical matters. As we will see in Chap. 2, the Pyrrhonist's 'conversion' to skepticism takes place after a systematic inquiry into a wide range of questions, an inquiry that up to this point has not enabled him to find answers to any of them. His continuing inquiry into those questions is to be explained by both his suspensive attitude and his inquisitive temperament or personality. Even though, once he becomes a Pyrrhonist, he makes no assertions, he is still engaged in open-minded and truth-directed inquiry. He may decide to write a book or work on a paper or give a talk or take part in a public debate because doing so appears to him to be a reasonable way to continue his investigations and test their results. Also, embarking on such an activity may be a source of enjoyment for him—a philosopher or a scientist may devote himself to his professional activity simply because he enjoys coming to understand a concept or a distinction, or simply because he enjoys dealing with paradoxes or difficulties even if he finds no solutions to them.

Before presenting the layout of the rest of the book, let me make some remarks concerning terminology, the scope of Pyrrhonian suspension, and Sextus's surviving works. Regarding terminology, I will henceforth follow Sextus in employing 'skeptic' interchangeably with 'Pyrrhonist'—in fact, he uses the former much more often than the latter. When referring to non-Pyrrhonian skeptics or non-Pyrrhonian forms of skepticism, I will make that clear. I will also follow Sextus in using 'dogmatist' to refer to anyone who makes assertions about the nature of things or about non-evident matters mainly on the basis of what he takes to be sound arguments and objective evidence.[23] The dogmatist's inclination to make assertions is to be

[23] For instance, Sextus defines a "dogmatic supposition" as "the acceptance of a fact that seems to be established by analogy or some kind of proof, for example, that there are atomic elements of existing things, or homoeomeries, or ultimate parts, or some other things" (*Pyrrhonian Outlines* I 147).

explained by his arrogance, rashness, and self-satisfaction—which Sextus regards as characteristic of dogmatism.[24] One point of contact with the modern sense of 'dogmatist' is that, by the Pyrrhonist's lights, the dogmatist does not take sufficient account of his rivals' arguments.

One of the most vexed exegetical questions facing the student of Sextan Pyrrhonism concerns the scope of suspension of judgment: is it limited to a specific type of belief or else encompasses all types of belief? The scholarly debate on this issue has been couched in various ways: whether the Pyrrhonist disavows only theoretical or philosophico-scientific beliefs or also ordinary or common-sense beliefs (Barnes, 1990; Burnyeat, 1997a, b; Frede, 1997), or whether (all of) his appearance-statements are "non-epistemic" (Burnyeat, 1997a, b), "non-doxastic" (Fine, 2000), or "non-judgmental" (Barney, 1992). The view of Pyrrhonism as a moderate skepticism is known as the "urbane," "country gentleman's," or "some-belief" interpretation (Barnes, 1990; Burnyeat, 1997b; Fine, 2000), while the view of it as a radical skepticism is known as the "rustic" or "no-belief" interpretation (Barnes, 1990; Fine, 2000). I will not explicitly discuss the question of the scope of suspension because I do not have anything new to add to the debate in the terms in which it has been carried out. However, the interpretation of Pyrrhonism proposed in this book, according to which the Pyrrhonist is not doxastically committed to the requirements of rationality and suspends judgment about whether any kind of disagreement can be resolved, is clearly in line with the rustic interpretation.[25] Even if my reading of Sextus's stance as a radical form of skepticism is in the end exegetically incorrect, I think that it does do justice to a number of elements contained in his account of Pyrrhonism. There is one respect, though, in which his skepticism is not as radical as it could have been: he seems to accept that one can have knowledge of one's own appearances, of the various ways one is appeared to. Even so, we will see, first, that other ancient Pyrrhonists did call such knowledge into question and, second, that contemporary experimental research provides the neo-Pyrrhonist with grounds for suspending judgment about the possibility of knowledge of one's own current phenomenology.

Two complete works and an important part of a third by Sextus have come down to us: the three books of Πυρρώνειοι Ὑποτυπώσεις (*Pyrrhonian Outlines*), the six books of Πρὸς Μαθηματικούς (*Against the Learned*), and the five extant books of Πρὸς Δογματικούς (*Against the Dogmatists*). To refer to *Pyrrhonian Outlines*, I will use the standard abbreviation *PH*, which are the initials of the transliterated Greek title, *Pyrrōneioi Hypotypōseis*. As for the other two works, they are better known by their Latinized titles of *Adversus Mathematicos* and *Adversus Dogmaticos*,

[24] See *Pyrrhonian Outlines* I 20, 62, 90, 177, 186, 212, II 17, 21, III 2, 235, 280–281. Cf. *Pyrrhonian Outlies* I 205, 237, II 37, 94, III 79; *Adversus Dogmaticos* I 1, III 49.

[25] In this respect, too, my neo-Pyrrhonian stance is different from that of Fogelin, who, relying on Michael Frede's interpretation of Sextus's Pyrrhonism and without examining the Sextan texts themselves, maintains—as we saw in note 11—that his neo-Pyrrhonism does not target ordinary beliefs. I take it that a neo-Pyrrhonian stance that does not call into question the epistemic justification of ordinary beliefs is not Pyrrhonian at all.

respectively. Although it is clear that they are two distinct works,[26] in our manuscripts *Adversus Dogmaticos* is attached to the end of *Adversus Mathematicos*. This has given rise to the entrenched practice of referring to the five surviving books of *Adversus Dogmaticos* as *Adversus Mathematicos* VII–XI. This conventional designation not only is incorrect but also creates confusion among non-specialists: I keep reading and reviewing articles and books whose authors believe that *Adversus Mathematicos* I–XI is a single work.[27] For this reason, I have decided not to follow the established practice: I will use the abbreviation *AM* to refer to *Adversus Mathematicos* and the abbreviation *AD* to refer to *Adversus Dogmaticos*.[28] References to any of the three Sextan works are by book number (in Roman numerals) and section number (in Arabic numerals).

1.4 Layout of the Book

The present book consists of two main parts, corresponding to the two central aims referred to in the previous section. In the first part (Chaps. 2, 3, 4 and 5), I offer an interpretation of some of the central aspects of Sextus's Pyrrhonism. The approach, though, is not only exegetical but also systematic. For, as already noted, I sometimes go beyond what is explicitly said in Sextus's texts and try to understand and make sense of his Pyrrhonism as a kind of philosophy. Now, two caveats are in order. First, I am well aware that in Sextus's surviving writings one sometimes detects different and even incompatible stances that seem to correspond to distinct varieties of skepticism and to reflect his use of distinct sources to compose those writings.[29] Second, I am also aware that, as Jonathan Barnes has observed, a "subtle reader can always, or almost always, explain away the anomalies which appear on the surface of most texts; but there is such a vice as oversubtlety, and it is a vice to which clever scholars are by temperament inclined" (2000: xv). These two points notwithstanding, I think it is possible both to recognize in Sextus's extant works a skeptical voice that is louder than the others and to smooth over certain textual tensions without succumbing to the vice of oversubtlety or to an excessive use of the principle of charity.

[26] First, *Adversus Dogmaticos* I 1 refers back to a just-completed general treatment of Pyrrhonism that corresponds to nothing found in *Adversus Mathematicos*. Second, the beginning and the end of *Adversus Mathematicos* (I 1, VI 68) clearly show that it is a complete and self-contained work. Finally, the topic of the surviving books of *Adversus Dogmaticos* is completely different from that of *Adversus Mathematicos*.

[27] Even specialists such as Michael Frede (1999: 281) and Charlotte Stough (2010: 736) say that two works by Sextus have come down to us, namely, *Pyrrhonian Outlines* in three books and *Adversus Mathematicos* in eleven books.

[28] For the past fifteen years, I have used the conventional title *Adversus Mathematicos* VII–XI in my published work only when I was asked to do so.

[29] For an overview of the distinct varieties of skepticism detectable in Sextus's extant works, see Machuca (2008: sect. III).

Although contemporary philosophical views are engaged with starting already in the first part of the book, it is in the second part (Chaps. 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10) where the Pyrrhonian approach is applied more fully to current philosophical debates. By exploring how a Pyrrhonist would engage with present-day discussions of the epistemic significance of disagreement, self-knowledge, and the nature of rationality, I aim to show that Pyrrhonism may be a live philosophical option. I take the neo-Pyrrhonism presented in the second part of the book to be in line with the defining features of Sextus's skeptical stance.

In Chap. 2, I examine the nature and purpose of the Pyrrhonist's philosophical investigation. I defend the minority view among specialists according to which (i) both the prospective Pyrrhonist and the full-fledged Pyrrhonist are depicted by Sextus as inquirers into truth, and (ii) the full-fledged Pyrrhonist can, without inconsistency, engage in truth-directed inquiry. I also offer a deflationary explanation of the Pyrrhonist's interest in discovering the truth about the matters being investigated, and I view Sextus's account of both the source of doxastic disturbance and the practical goal of skepticism as being compatible with the Pyrrhonist's engagement in truth-directed inquiry. Lastly, I analyze the connection between ongoing engagement in inquiry and the maintenance of suspension of judgment, and I consider whether involvement in inquiry is a defining feature of Pyrrhonism.

In Chap. 3, I examine the oft-cited final chapter of *PH*, which presents the skeptic's therapeutic use of arguments and its philanthropic motivation. In so doing, I look at the connection between such a use and the dialectical character of the skeptic's argumentation. I also consider whether Sextus's description of the skeptic as an inquirer into truth is compatible with the therapeutic and dialectical uses of arguments. Finally, I distinguish between two kinds of persuasiveness and explore how certain arguments may appear persuasive to the skeptic himself without this implying any doxastic commitment on his part.

Chapter 4 is devoted to the so-called Five Modes of Agrippa. I briefly explain how these modes induce suspension, show the epistemic significance of the mode from disagreement, and argue that there is a sense in which the Pyrrhonist can be said to assent to the Agrippan modes. I also consider, and respond to, recent objections to the effect that these modes rely on questionable assumptions and that this fact neutralizes the epistemic threat they are supposed to pose. In so doing, I stress the dialectical use the Pyrrhonist makes of the Agrippan modes and argue that the mode from disagreement raises a serious challenge to the champions of the different contemporary epistemological theories. Lastly, I offer an interpretation of what I call "the argument from possible disagreement" that renders this argument compatible with the skeptical stance.

In Chap. 5, I analyze the Pyrrhonist's attitude towards reason and the so-called requirements of rationality. I argue that he makes an extensive yet detached and non-normative use of reason, and that he is not doxastically committed to rational requirements, without thereby rejecting them. I therefore occupy a middle ground between those who claim that the Pyrrhonist is committed to the requirements of rationality and those who claim that he is an anti-rationalist. My discussion of

Pyrrhonian rationality is carried out mainly in connection with the law of non-contradiction and the state of suspension of judgment.

In the second part of the book, I set aside almost entirely the exegetical approach of the first part and instead adopt one that is much more systematic. Chapter 6 is devoted to examining the current debate on the epistemic significance of peer disagreement from a neo-Pyrrhonian perspective. After providing an overview of the debate, I argue that several views that both conciliationists and steadfasters take for granted can be called into question. I also take issue with the view that, in the face of peer disagreement, one can rationally hold one's ground by appealing either to the alleged fact that one has adequately responded to the first-order evidence bearing on the disputed matter or to the ineliminability of the first-person perspective and the self-trust that comes with it.

The next two chapters deal with the appeal to personal information, and self-knowledge in general, as an effective strategy for resolving disagreements from a first-person vantage point. In Chap. 7, I call into question that strategy based on purely theoretical considerations, claiming that there is a dialectical symmetry with epistemic implications between the disputants who appeal to personal information as a symmetry breaker. I also argue that, even if one grants for the sake of argument that personal information is accurate, when it comes to real-life disagreements, awareness of the partial or total lack of information about one's opponent's epistemic situation gives one a reason to doubt that personal information can function as a symmetry breaker.

In Chap. 8, I argue against the above strategy by relying on a wide range of philosophical and psychological studies on overconfidence, the bias blind spot, introspection, and confabulation. Reviewing the results of those studies will cause the unsettling feeling that we seem to know much less about ourselves than we think. I also address four objections that could be raised to the neo-Pyrrhonist's use of the studies in question. In an Appendix to the chapter, I examine whether the ancient Pyrrhonist takes himself to have knowledge of the way he is appeared to or the way he is affected.

Chapter 9 considers, and responds to, an objection that has been raised to conciliationist views on peer disagreement and that could also be raised to Pyrrhonism: what I call "the disagreeing about disagreement argument." When directed against the latter, this argument claims that the Pyrrhonian stance is self-defeating or self-undermining because, once the Pyrrhonist finds out that others disagree with him about whether we should suspend judgment in the face of most disagreements, he should suspend judgment about whether or not he should suspend judgment. My response to this objection is based on the interpretation of suspension proposed in Chap. 5.

In Chap. 10, I first review a number of current theories of rationality that explain what rationality consists in and whether it is normative. I then explore whether the Pyrrhonist should be deemed rational or irrational according to each of those theories and what his stand is on the normativity of rationality. Next, I look at two views that have been defended by contemporary philosophers, namely, that according to which there are some true contradictions and that according to which there are

counterexamples to *modus ponens* and *modus tollens*. This chapter complements the discussion of Pyrrhonian rationality in Chap. 5.

Chapter 11, the Coda, first briefly highlights the main conclusions of the nine chapters just summarized. It then considers whether Pyrrhonism has any epistemic or prudential value and whether it is devoid of philosophical interest to contemporary readers.

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Part I
Pyrrhonism Past

Chapter 2
Pyrrhonian Inquiry

Abstract In this chapter, I explore the skeptic's engagement in inquiry or investigation. I defend the view that Sextus describes both the prospective Pyrrhonist and the full-fledged Pyrrhonist as inquirers into truth, and that the full-fledged Pyrrhonist can, without inconsistency, inquire into truth. In defending this view, I present some of the problems that the Pyrrhonist's ongoing engagement in open-minded and truth-oriented inquiry seems to pose for the coherence of his skepticism, and I argue that those problems can be solved. I also examine the connection between continuing engagement in inquiry and the maintenance of suspension of judgment, and I consider whether involvement in inquiry is a defining feature of Pyrrhonism.

Keywords Academic skepticism · Epistemic goal · Inquiry · Negative metadogmatism · Practical goal · Suspension of judgment · Truth · Undisturbedness

2.1 Introduction

Sextus associates the Pyrrhonian stance with the activity of inquiry or investigation. I begin my exploration of Sextan Pyrrhonism by examining the skeptic's involvement in that activity because getting an accurate understanding of the nature and purpose of skeptical inquiry will make it possible to delineate some of the distinctive traits of Pyrrhonism as a kind of philosophy. I defend the minority view among specialists according to which (i) Sextus describes both the prospective Pyrrhonist and the full-fledged Pyrrhonist as inquirers into truth, and (ii) the full-fledged Pyrrhonist can, without inconsistency, engage in truth-directed inquiry.

In Sect. 2.2, I quote and examine the three central passages bearing on the Pyrrhonist's philosophical investigation. In Sect. 2.3, I present some of the problems that the Pyrrhonist's ongoing engagement in open-minded and truth-directed inquiry allegedly poses for the coherence of his skepticism, and I argue that those problems can be solved. The interpretation I defend differs in important respects from similar interpretations put forth in the literature: I offer a deflationary explanation of the Pyrrhonist's interest in discovering the truth about the matters being investigated, and I view Sextus's account of both the source of doxastic disturbance

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and the practical goal of skepticism as being compatible with the Pyrrhonist's involvement in truth-directed inquiry. In Sect. 2.4, I briefly examine the connection between continuing inquiry and the maintenance of suspension of judgment, and I consider whether engagement in inquiry is a defining feature of Pyrrhonism.

2.2 The Skeptic as Inquirer

There are fifteen passages from Sextus's extant works that are particularly relevant to the question of the goal of Pyrrhonian inquiry. I will label them **P1** to **P15** for ease of discussion. In this section, I quote and analyze the three that most clearly present the skeptic's involvement in inquiry, while in Sect. 2.3 I quote and analyze the remaining passages.[1] In the first of the passages quoted below, Sextus distinguishes between three kinds of philosophy; in the second, he explains the appellations of Pyrrhonism; and in the third, he responds to the objection that the Pyrrhonist, because of his suspension of judgment, cannot investigate what the dogmatists talk about.

P1. For those who investigate any matter, the likely result is either a discovery, or a denial of discovery and an admission of inapprehensibility, or a continuation of the investigation (ἐπιμονὴν ζητήσεως). This is perhaps why also with regard to the matters investigated in philosophy some have said that they have discovered the truth, some have asserted that it cannot be apprehended, and others are still investigating (ἔτι ζητοῦσιν). Those called dogmatists in the proper sense of the term think that they have discovered it—for instance, the followers of Aristotle and Epicurus and the Stoics, and some others. Clitomachus and Carneades and other Academics have asserted that it concerns things that are inapprehensible. And the skeptics are [still] investigating (ζητοῦσι δὲ οἱ σκεπτικοί). (*PH* I 1–3)

P2. The skeptical approach,[2] then, is called 'investigative' because of its activity concerning investigation and inquiry; 'suspensive' because of the affection[3] that comes about in the inquirer after the investigation; 'aporetic' either because, with regard to everything, it is in *aporia* and investigates (ἀπορεῖν καὶ ζητεῖν), as some say, or because of its being at a loss (ἀμηχανεῖν) in relation to assent or denial; and 'Pyrrhonian' because Pyrrho appears to us to have attached himself to skepticism more tangibly and more conspicuously than his predecessors. (*PH* I 7)

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[1] The translations of all the ancient texts quoted in this book are my own, but I have consulted the translations listed in Section I of the Bibliography. For Sextus's works, I have used the canonical three-volume Teubner edition of the Greek text by Hermann Mutschmann and Jürgen Mau—also listed therein.

[2] When referring to skepticism, Sextus often employs the expression ἡ σκεπτικὴ ἀγωγή or simply ἡ σκεπτική, by which he means the skeptical way of life, way of thinking, or approach.

[3] A πάθος is that which happens to someone or something as a result of being affected by an agent in the broad sense of this term. It refers to the physical or psychological state or condition in which the affected person or thing is. Even though in modern ordinary English 'affection' does not have that meaning anymore, I choose that term to render πάθος for two reasons: not only has 'affection' become in the specialist literature a technical term to translate πάθος, but it also has the advantage of making clear the connection between πάθος and its cognate verb πάσχειν ('to be affected').

P3. If they say that they mean that it is not this kind of apprehension but rather thinking *simpliciter* that should precede investigation, then investigation is not impossible for those who suspend judgment about the reality of non-evident things. For the skeptic is not, I suppose, excluded from thinking that both arises from things that passively strike him and arguments that appear evidently to him, and in no way implies the reality of the things that are thought—for we can think, as they say, not only of real things, but also of unreal ones. For this reason, while both investigating and thinking the suspender of judgment remains in the skeptical disposition; for it has been shown that he assents to the things that strike him in accordance with a passive appearance insofar as it appears to him.

And consider whether even in this case the dogmatists are not debarred from investigation. For to continue investigating (τὸ ζητεῖν ἔτι) the objects is not inconsistent for those who agree that they do not know how they are in their nature, but for those who think that they know them accurately (ἐπ' ἀκριβὲς […] γινώσκειν). Indeed, for the latter the investigation has already reached its end, as they suppose, whereas for the former the reason why all investigation is undertaken—the thought that they have not made a discovery—still exists (ἀκμὴν ὑπάρχει). (*PH* II 10–11)

At least seven sets of remarks are in order regarding these three passages. To begin with, on the basis of the three different results of philosophical investigation he singles out in **P1**, Sextus distinguishes between three main kinds of philosophy: the dogmatic, the Academic, and the skeptical (*PH* I 4). In the literature, the Academics' stance is usually referred to as "negative dogmatism," but also—albeit much less frequently—as "negative meta-dogmatism" because they do not make first-order assertions about the matters being investigated, but rather a second-order assertion about the possibility of apprehension or knowledge of the truth about those matters.[4] The second-order modal assertion that everything is inapprehensible is again ascribed to Carneades and Clitomachus at *PH* I 226.[5] It might be objected that the claim that matter *x* is inapprehensible is not necessarily second-order. It is so if and only if it is based on second-order reasons: e.g., matter *x* belongs to class C and, according to epistemology E, everything belonging to C is inapprehensible. But the reasons may all be first-order: e.g., the negative dogmatist about *x* might be a positive dogmatist about other first-order matters and appeal to his discoveries about those matters in defending his claim that matter *x* is inapprehensible. If the claim that *x* is inapprehensible is supported in this way, then it is a first-order conclusion about matter *x*. I agree that it is indeed possible to arrive at a negative conclusion in the suggested way. But in the case of the Academics, the assertion that Sextus ascribes to them is a sweeping one applying to a whole class of matters that is based on a second-order view on the limits of our knowledge. The second position in the general distinction made in the first sentence of **P1** may well be a negative dogmatism about a given first-order matter that is based on a positive dogmatism about

[4] Cf. Barnes (1992: 4254 with n. 72) in connection with the second-order negative assertions ascribed to the Pyrrhonists by Diogenes Laertius.

[5] It is worth noting that Sextus ascribes the assertion that the external underlying objects are inapprehensible to the Cyrenaics (*PH* I 215), and the assertion that non-evident things are inapprehensible to the medical Empiricists (*PH* I 236).

other first-order matters. But when the distinction is applied, in the second sentence, to the whole range of matters investigated in philosophy, the second position is clearly a second-order one. For if the Academics accepted that it is possible to make discoveries about first-order matters, the distinction between the dogmatic and the Academic philosophies would make no sense.[6] It might also be objected that applying the label 'dogmatic' or 'meta-dogmatic' to the Academic position would look improper in Sextus's eyes, since in **P1** he observes that those who claim to have discovered the truth are called dogmatists in the proper sense of this term (ἰδίως), and in **P3** the dogmatists are those who think they know accurately how the objects are in their nature. Note, however, that in at least three passages Sextus explicitly characterizes negative views as dogmatic: he observes that it is dogmatic to affirm that the criterion of truth is unreal (*PH* II 79), to set out the arguments against the reality of the sign with confidence or assent (*AD* II 159), or to claim that the disciplines contribute nothing to wisdom (*AM* I 5).

Second, although in **P1** the position of the Academics is described as a denial of discovery, it could be argued that they have discovered the inapprehensibility of things. What the Academics deny is the possibility of making first-order discoveries because the nature of things cannot be apprehended. If we interpret the Academics as having made a second-order discovery, then we can apply to them the idea, found in **P3**, that the investigation about a given matter comes to an end whenever one makes a discovery. This would explain why, as **P1** makes clear, the skeptics are depicted as the only ones who continue to investigate: for both the positive dogmatists and the Academics the investigation has already come to an end because they have discovered either a first- or a second-order truth. But are the skeptics really the only ones who may legitimately continue the inquiry into truth? I think not, for two reasons. First, a positive dogmatist may inquire into a matter about which he does not yet hold any beliefs—even though he does hold beliefs about other matters. Second, it is possible to combine a less than full or outright belief with investigation: one can hold the belief that *p* and continue to investigate whether *p* when one holds that belief with less than full confidence (cf. Barnes, 2007: 323–324). One continues the inquiry into whether *p* in order to gather further evidence bearing on the question whether *p*. In partial defense of Sextus, it should be noted that, at *PH* I 2, he talks of those who claim to have *discovered the truth*, which, as the context makes clear, is to be understood in the sense that they claim to *know that p*, i.e., to have a justified true full belief that *p*. And at *PH* II 11, he talks of those who claim to *know accurately* how things are by nature. If the goal of inquiry is knowledge, then, if one knows (or claims to know) the answer to a question, one does not inquire into that question. In the passages under consideration, Sextus is working with that conception of the goal of inquiry—either unconsciously influenced by his

[6] At this point, a caveat is in order: when referring to the negative meta-dogmatism of the Academics, I restrict myself to the view Sextus ascribes to them, without making any claim about the accuracy of this ascription. The reason is simply that my aim is not to determine what view they actually held, but only to make use of what Sextus says about them in order to understand the Pyrrhonian outlook. On Sextus's testimony on the skeptical Academy, see Ioppolo (2009).

philosophical milieu or consciously proceeding in a dialectical manner—though I think he would also regard inquiry into whether *p* as incompatible with fully believing (truly or falsely, justifiably or unjustifiably) that *p* or not-*p*.[7]

Third, the Academics' negative meta-dogmatism is compatible with a thoroughgoing first-order suspension of judgment. In fact, several sources explicitly ascribe suspension to the Academics.[8] One may suppose that they suspend judgment about what any given thing is like precisely because they assert that the truth about first-order matters cannot be apprehended: if it is not possible to know how things are, then one cannot but suspend judgment about how they are.[9] The key difference between the Academic and the Pyrrhonist is that the latter suspends judgment *also* about the question whether things are apprehensible or knowable, and so the Pyrrhonist's suspension is more comprehensive than the Academic's. When contrasting the Pyrrhonian outlook with the negative meta-dogmatism of the New Academy of Carneades and Clitomachus, Sextus points out that "the skeptic expects it to be even possible for some things to be apprehended" (*PH* I 226). Likewise, when explaining the skeptical phrase "All things are inapprehensible," Sextus

[7] Sextus's remark that inquiring is incompatible with having knowledge has a remarkable parallel in Jane Friedman's "Ignorance Norm for the Interrogative Attitudes": "Necessarily, if one knows *Q* at *t*, then one ought not have an IA towards *Q* at *t*" (2017: 311)—a norm that has been criticized by Archer (2018) and Raleigh (2021). Friedman regards interrogative attitudes as "a fairly central class of inquiry-related attitudes, attitudes that we have as we attempt to find answers, attitudes that represent various forms of ignorance in inquiry" (2013b: 168), and she claims that "the interrogative attitudes all involve suspension of judgment" (2019b: 88; also 2017: 317). Although Friedman (2017: 306) quotes *PH* I 1–3 and II 11, she offers no analysis of these passages and, quite surprisingly, does not relate them to her Ignorance Norm for the Interrogative Attitudes. Friedman (2019a: 303) talks of a different norm, which she calls "Don't Believe and Inquire": "One ought not inquire into/have an interrogative attitude towards *Q* at *t* and believe p^{Q} [i.e., a complete answer to *Q*] at *t*." Although Sextus would not make this normative claim—just as he would not make the above normative claim—the idea that the person who inquires into a question does not believe a complete answer to that question can also be taken to describe his stance—as Friedman (2019a: 304) herself recognizes. Let me finally remark that Sextus's influence on Friedman is also seen in the intimate connection she claims there is between suspension and inquiry: in her view, one inquires into some matter if and only if one suspends judgment about that matter (see especially Friedman 2017, also 2019b: 88–89; cf. 2013a: 179–180). Although she recognizes that her view is inspired by Sextus (2017: 302, 306, also 2013a: 179 n. 22), unfortunately she does not say much about his stance, nor does she consider the secondary literature on Pyrrhonian inquiry and its connection with suspension.

[8] See *PH* I 232; Cicero, *Academica* (*Acad.*) I 45; Diogenes Laertius (DL) IV 28, 32; Plutarch, *Contra Colotem* 1122A; Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* XIV.7.15. All these passages refer to Arcesilaus—the founder of the skeptical Academy—who is not mentioned in **P1**. Also, when Sextus discusses Arcesilaus's stance at *PH* I 232–234, he does not ascribe a negative meta-dogmatic position to Arcesilaus. By contrast, Cicero does ascribe such a position to Arcesilaus at *Acad.* I 45 (*pace* Catapano, 2016: 195–196). See also note 9.

[9] At *Acad.* I 45, Cicero claims that Arcesilaus's suspension is based on the acceptance of universal inapprehensibility. Note also that Diogenes ascribes the same view to the Pyrrhonists when he remarks that "suspenders of judgment (ἐφεκτικοί) are those who suspend judgment about things as being inapprehensible" (DL I 16), which is clearly at variance with Sextus's account of Pyrrhonism.

remarks that he does not assert that all the non-evident matters investigated dogmatically that he has inspected are of such a nature as to be inapprehensible, but merely reports that they appear so to him owing to the equipollence of the opposites (*PH* I 200). The reason the Pyrrhonist's first-order agnosticism is not the result of the endorsement of the second-order view that it is impossible to apprehend how things really are is that his skepticism is also a meta-agnosticism. It is for this reason that he can remain engaged in open-minded inquiry into truth. By contrast, the Academic's first-order agnosticism does rest on such a second-order epistemological view,[10] which explains why he has abandoned both inquiry into all first-order matters and inquiry into the second-order question whether it is possible to know how things really are: the former inquiry will provide no answers because the latter inquiry has already provided a negative answer.[11]

Fourth, it should be emphasized that it is a mistake to characterize skeptical investigation as endless, never-ending, infinite, or lifelong, and the Pyrrhonist as a perpetual inquirer, as commentators often do.[12] Such a characterization implies that the Pyrrhonist believes that the quest for truth is doomed to failure because the answers to the questions under investigation cannot be discovered or apprehended,[13] a belief that would liken his stance to the one ascribed to certain Academics in **P1**.[14] It could be objected that, if the Pyrrhonist's investigation has no end in sight, he cannot be a negative meta-dogmatist because the latter would not bother to engage in inquiry in the first place. In response, it may be argued that the Academics mentioned by Sextus are no longer engaged in the inquiry into the truth about first-order

[10] In this respect, the Academics' position is similar to the agnosticism described by Russell (1999) and Rosenkranz (2007).

[11] Mark Walker's (2015, 2016) skeptical dogmatism, according to which we have good reason to maintain that all our commonsense first-order claims about the external world are probably false, is clearly different from the Academic's stance. For while the skeptical dogmatist makes non-modal negative assertions about first-order matters, the Academic suspends judgment about all such matters. The skeptical dogmatist belongs, according to Sextus's taxonomy, to the group of those who claim to have discovered the truth about first-order matters. In a nutshell, while skeptical dogmatism is a non-modal first-order negative dogmatism, the Academic stance is a modal second-order negative dogmatism.

[12] See Cavini (1981: 540), Sedley (1983: 22), Annas and Barnes (1985: 1), Tarrant (1985: 26), de Olaso (1988: 23, 26, 29), Hankinson (1998: 14, 29, 300; 2020: 79), Harte and Lane (1999: 158, 171), Barnes (2000: xxi; 2007: 327–328), Spinelli (2000: 49; 2005a: 117; 2005b: 150), Naya (2001: 54), and Grgić (2006: 142–144, 156; 2008: 436, 444; 2014: 654).

[13] The claim that the Pyrrhonist rules out the possibility of eventually discovering the truth is explicitly made by de Olaso (1983: 60; 1988: 13, 17, 24), Tarrant (1985: 26), Laurent (1993: 652), Brunschwig (1995: 322 n. 1, but see 339 n. 1), and Palmer (2000: 355).

[14] It might be argued that one should distinguish between the perspective of the skeptic and that of the commentator: commentators may be right that the skeptic is forced by his own stance to investigate endlessly, even though he would not describe himself as a perpetual inquirer. I agree that this distinction is important. But as far as I can tell, at least most of the commentators mentioned in note 12 take themselves to be characterizing the skeptical stance as depicted by Sextus. If they do not, they are in any case mistaken in claiming that the skeptic is forced by his own stance to investigate endlessly, as I intend to show in this chapter.

matters precisely because they believe that it is endless—inasmuch as a positive discovery will never take place[15]—and hence that, if they remained engaged in that activity, they would become perpetual inquirers. Since taking part in such a futile epistemic activity would make no sense, they decided to stop investigating. If the Pyrrhonist kept engaged in an inquiry into *x* that in his view has no end inasmuch as the truth about *x* cannot be found—either because it is undiscoverable by nature or because inquirers are incapable of discovering it—he would be an unreasonable negative meta-dogmatist: he would continue to take part in an activity he knows to be pointless.

Fifth, the centrality of the activity of investigation in the skeptic's practice is seen not only in the fact that Sextus distinguishes skepticism from the other two main types of philosophy by reference to the distinct results of that activity, but also in the fact that 'investigative' is, as we are told in **P2**, one of the ways the skeptical approach is called. The reference to the activity of investigation is also found in the explanation of the terms 'suspensive' and 'aporetic'. In addition, as you probably already know, the Greek terms one translates as 'skeptic' and 'skepticism', namely σκεπτικός and σκέψις, mean 'inquirer' and 'inquiry', respectively. Note that, in **P2**, Sextus talks about the activity of inquiring (σκέπτεσθαι) and about the person who inquires (τὸν σκεπτόμενον). Hence, ἡ σκεπτικὴ ἀγωγή literally means "the inquisitive/inquiring approach." Although Aenesidemus of Cnossos—responsible for the revival, in the first century BCE, of what he took to be Pyrrhonian skepticism—did not probably use 'skeptic' but only 'Pyrrhonist', Sextus usually employs the former term when referring to the Pyrrhonists.[16]

Sixth, at the beginning of his philosophical journey, the prospective skeptic is in a state of *aporia* because he does not know how the conflicts of appearances are to be resolved (see *PH* I 12 and *AM* I 6, to be quoted in the next section). But once he suspends judgment and becomes a full-blown skeptic, he is still in that state: in **P2** Sextus refers to the skeptical stance as aporetic, and in other passages he uses 'aporetic' as synonymous with 'skeptical' and 'Pyrrhonian' (*PH* I 221–222, 234) and refers to the skeptics as 'aporetics' (*AD* II 76, 78, 80, 99, 160, 278, III 207, 303, IV 66, 68, 105, 246, 340; *AM* I 214). So, is there any difference between the two phases of the skeptic's philosophical journey? One crucial difference is that the full-blown skeptic is not merely in *aporia* inasmuch as, having carried out a careful inquiry into the disputed issues and having found no answers, he suspends judgment. The person who is only in *aporia* about whether *p* is in a state of mere non-belief regarding *p*, whereas the person who in addition suspends judgment about whether *p* is in a state of non-belief regarding *p* after having considered the question whether *p* and found

[15] Academic skepticism is therefore an instance of what Goldberg (2020) describes as a demoralizing form of skepticism, according to which it is not possible to rectify one's current epistemic impoverishment on the question whether *p*.

[16] It is commonly agreed that only in the early second century CE did 'skeptic' come to be generally employed as a designation of the Pyrrhonist—although sometimes it was also applied to the Academics. See Janáček (1979), Striker (1996: 92 n. 1), Sedley (1983: 20, 27–28 n. 61), Tarrant (1985: 22–29), Decleva Caizzi (1992: 296–297), and Polito (2007: 337).

no answers. Thus, the full-blown skeptic both is in *aporia* and suspends judgment, whereas the prospective skeptic is only in *aporia* because he has not yet engaged in inquiry. Another crucial difference is that the prospective skeptic believes that there is a truth about the matters under investigation and that it can be apprehended, whereas the full-blown skeptic suspends judgment about both questions.

Lastly, may the Pyrrhonist hold beliefs about matters he has not yet investigated? In **P2**, Sextus tells us that suspension comes about in the inquirer after the investigation, and at *PH* I 196 he remarks that suspension "is so called from the fact that the intellect is suspended so as neither to accept nor to reject anything because of the equipollence of the matters investigated." The Pyrrhonist's suspension is thus restricted to the matters he has investigated. Now, it is plain that he has not inquired into all the matters into which he might inquire due to lack of time, information, or resources. It might then be thought that, for the time being, he may legitimately retain beliefs he acquired through, e.g., unreflective perceptual processes, testimony, or even previous inquiry not conducted in skeptical fashion—i.e., inquiry that did not take proper account of the conflicting views that have been, or could be, proposed on the matter under investigation. This line of thought faces the problem that, when addressing the question whether Plato's stance is purely skeptical, Sextus remarks that, even if Plato sometimes speaks in skeptical fashion, he cannot be deemed a skeptic simply because the person "who dogmatizes[17] about a single thing, or in general prefers one appearance to another in respect of credibility and lack of credibility, or makes assertions about any non-evident matter, adopts the distinctive character of the dogmatist" (*PH* I 223). Thus, on the one hand, Sextus tells us that the skeptic suspends judgment only about the matters he has investigated, but, on the other, he says that a true skeptic does not dogmatize, i.e., holds no beliefs, which means that a true skeptic does not even hold beliefs about matters he has not yet investigated. I think we can offer a solution to this tension on Sextus's behalf. Note that "not to believe that *p*" may mean one of three things: (i) "to suspend judgment about whether *p*," (ii) "to disbelieve that *p*," or (iii) "to be in a state of non-belief regarding *p* because one has not considered whether *p*." We can hypothesize that the skeptic is in state (iii) with regard to the matters he has not yet investigated. More specifically, he is in a state of non-belief regarding *p* because he has not considered whether *p* either at all or in skeptical fashion. For, after having investigated a wide range of matters in various areas and suspended judgment about all of them, the skeptic may become aware that the matters about which people hold beliefs are in fact extremely intricate and that people tend to form those beliefs in a rash manner. Such rashness can be observed even among those who have investigated the matter about which they take a view, for they have not done so in skeptical fashion. The skeptic may thus come to think that a more cautious attitude towards the matters about which he still holds beliefs seems called for until a careful skeptical inquiry into them is conducted: he may decide to *bracket* those beliefs. After

[17] I translate δογματίζειν as 'to dogmatize' to make clear the connection with 'dogmatism' and 'dogmatist'. For this same reason, I will render δόγμα as 'dogma'. The Greek δόγμα can be taken to mean 'belief', and so δογματίζειν can be taken to refer to the holding of beliefs.

having suspended belief about all the matters he has thus far investigated, the skeptic might have the expectation that he will also suspend the bracketed beliefs once he investigates the matters he has not investigated at all or in skeptical fashion. But such an expectation is merely non-doxastic rather than based on a commitment to inductive inference or to the efficacy of the skeptic's argumentative strategies. For the skeptic does not rule out the possibility that he might come to the conclusion that the bracketed beliefs are true or epistemically justified. I am not sure whether Sextus would have provided this suggested solution if he had been pressed to explain the above tension, but I do think that the solution is not at variance with the Pyrrhonian stance.

2.3 Can the Skeptic Search for Truth?

Sextus's description of the Pyrrhonist as an inquirer into truth has been called into question by most interpreters. It has been argued that such a description faces at least six problems that show that truth-directed inquiry and skepticism are incompatible or that there is a gap between the theory and the practice of skepticism,[18] and hence that Sextus is wrong in saying that the Pyrrhonist continues the search for truth[19] or that skepticism is a kind of philosophy.[20] Some interpreters have even claimed that Sextus does not actually depict the Pyrrhonist as an inquirer into truth.[21] In what follows, I will examine three of these problems and argue that they can be solved; while the first two can be dealt with easily, the third will require a more extensive discussion. The remaining problems—which concern the skeptic's use of therapeutic and dialectical arguments, of the Five Modes of Agrippa, and of the argument from possible disagreement—will be addressed in Chaps. 3 and 4.

The first alleged problem is that the skeptic cannot continue the search for truth once he has suspended judgment across the board, since the activity of investigation presupposes both the belief that there is a truth and the conviction that it can be found.[22] Now, it is plain that someone who believes that *x* exists and can be found searches for it more confidently than someone who suspends judgment about both its existence and its knowability. But if the latter person happens to have a curious

[18] See Janáček (1972: 28), Barnes (1990: 11), and Marchand (2010: 129). Cf. Mates (1996: 240).

[19] See Barnes (2000: xxx). This is also the view of Striker (2001: 114, 126–129), who argues in addition that the portrayal of the skeptic as someone who does not give up the quest for truth fits the Academic skeptics more adequately than it fits the Pyrrhonists. De Olaso (1988: 24–25) and Palmer (2000: 363–364), too, maintain that the Academic skeptic, not the Pyrrhonist, can be characterized as an inquirer into truth, although they do not think that Sextus claims to be searching for truth.

[20] See Barnes (2007: 329). Cf. Striker (2001: 121–124) and Grgić (2006: 153).

[21] See de Olaso (1983: 53; 1988: 25–26), Palmer (2000: 366), and Włodarczyk (2000: 57).

[22] See de Olaso (1983: 46), Aubenque (1985: 101), and Marchand (2010: 126). Cf. Włodarczyk (2000: 57).

or inquisitive temperament or personality, he may well undertake the quest for *x* precisely because he is open-minded: he excludes neither the possibility that *x* exists nor the possibility that he will eventually find it. Hence, searching for truth would be pointless only to those who deny that there is a truth or that it can be known.

The second alleged problem is that, judging from **P2**, the terms 'investigative' and 'suspensive' are incompatible: given that suspension is attained *after* the investigation is over (cf. DL IX 70), having a suspensive attitude is incompatible with the continuation of the investigation.[23] Suspending judgment should be regarded as a way of terminating inquiry. This problem is merely apparent. After each and every inquiry he has so far carried out, the Pyrrhonist has suspended judgment, but this should not be understood as something that happens once and for all because he does not rule out the possibility that his epistemic situation might change. As we saw in the previous section, he does not exclude the possibility that his investigation about any matter might result in a discovery because he does not make the modal claim that truth is unknowable. Given that his suspension is provisional, he can legitimately remain engaged in truth-oriented inquiry: he is willing to open-mindedly consider new arguments and doctrines advanced by his rivals or old ones that are presented to him in a different light. This open-mindedness is reflected in the following remarks by Sextus: (i) the disagreements that the skeptic has examined have so far remained unresolved (*PH* III 70; *AD* II 257, 427–428, V 229); (ii) up to now, the skeptic has not found a criterion of truth (*PH* III 70), but he is still investigating it (*PH* II 53); (iii) when the skeptic says that everything appears undetermined or inapprehensible, he is only referring to the matters he has investigated (*PH* I 198–200) and does not discount the possibility that some things can be apprehended (*PH* I 226); and (iv) for the moment, the skeptic refrains from affirming or denying any of the non-evident matters under investigation (*PH* I 201).

The third problem is more serious. Consider the following three passages, in which Sextus describes the Pyrrhonist's philosophical journey:

P4. The causal principle of the skeptical [approach] is the hope of becoming undisturbed. For men of talent, disturbed by the variation in things (τὴν ἐν τοῖς πράγμασιν ἀνωμαλίαν) and being in *aporia* as to which of them they should rather assent to, came to investigate what is true in things and what is false, so as to become undisturbed as a result of this decision. But the main constitutive principle of the skeptical [approach] is that to every argument an equal argument is opposed. For we think that because of this we cease to dogmatize (εἰς τὸ μὴ δογματίζειν). (*PH* I 12)

P5. Up to now, we say that the skeptic's aim is undisturbedness in matters of opinion and moderation of affection in things unavoidable (τὴν ἐν τοῖς κατὰ δόξαν ἀταραξίαν καὶ ἐν τοῖς κατηναγκασμένοις μετριοπάθειαν). For having begun to philosophize with the aim of deciding among the appearances and apprehending which are true and which false, so as to become undisturbed, he encountered an equipollent disagreement (ἰσοσθενῆ διαφωνίαν); being unable to decide it, he suspended judgment. And while he was suspending judgment, undisturbedness in matters of opinion closely followed him by chance. (*PH* I 25–26)

[23] See Janáček (1972: 28–29) and Barnes (2007: 327).

P6. The skeptics hoped to acquire undisturbedness by deciding the variation in the things that appear and that are thought, but being unable to do this, they suspended judgment. And while they were suspending judgment, undisturbedness closely followed them by chance, as it were, as a shadow [closely follows] a body. (*PH* I 29)

Sextus tells us that the skeptics began to do philosophy because they were disturbed by the variations they found in things and thought they would be able to rid themselves of such disturbance if they could decide which appearances are true and which are false. But when they could not make that decision and then suspended judgment, they unexpectedly achieved the state of undisturbedness. What is then the point of continuing the investigation once the skeptic has attained what he was looking for from the very beginning? Given that the search for truth seems to have been conceived *only* as a means to achieving undisturbedness, once he reaches his goal the skeptic is no longer interested in philosophical inquiry (Striker, 2001: 117–118; cf. Schellenberg, 2007: xi). The above question is more pressing if, as has been claimed, the disturbance experienced by the prospective skeptic was the product, not so much of the conflict of appearances, but of the desire to find the truth (Barnes, 2007: 329). To solve this problem, most interpreters have argued that the goal of the prospective skeptic's investigation is different from that of the full-fledged skeptic's investigation. The latter investigation is an inquiry that does not consist in the search for truth, but rather in the examination of dogmatic arguments and doctrines in order to construct conflicts between positions of equal strength because this makes it possible to maintain the states of suspension and undisturbedness. With the continuation of the investigation, the full-fledged skeptic seeks to maintain the state of mental tranquility that has been his goal from the outset of his philosophical journey.[24] Richard Bett is among those who maintain that the skeptic's inquiry into truth and his search for undisturbedness through suspension are incompatible activities. He claims: "If one has decided that suspension of judgment is the surest route to tranquility, and therefore concentrates on producing and maintaining suspension of judgment, one is no longer trying to discover the truth" (2013: 392). In his view, once the skeptic "finds that tranquility is in fact achieved after the search for truth fails and suspension of judgment ensues instead, the project of inquiry seems to be replaced by a project of developing an expertise in the production of equally powerful opposing arguments" (2013: 393). For this reason, he regards "the notion of the skeptic as a genuine inquirer as [an] anomalous element" (2013: 393). In support of his interpretation, Bett refers to the following two texts, in which Sextus offers a

[24] See de Olaso (1983: 60; 1988: 22–23), Hiley (1987: 189–193), Couloubaritsis (1990: 12–16), Loeb (1998: 205–207, 209, 214), Harte and Lane (1999: 158), Palmer (2000: 355, 367–369), Striker (2001: 118), Grgić (2006: 143, 153, 156), Irwin (2007: 234–235), Thorsrud (2009: 131, 135–136, 161), Bett (2010: 188–189; 2013: 389, 392–394, 397, 408), Marchand (2010: 134–139; 2019: 268–269), and Williams (2015: 89). Castagnoli (2018: 222–225) defends basically the same interpretation. But although he thinks that the full-fledged skeptic's inquiry is not best described as truth-directed (2018: 224 n. 85), he does not view inquiry aimed at suspension as incompatible with inquiry into truth (2018: 223–225).

definition of skepticism and examines whether the Pyrrhonist inquires into natural phenomena:

> **P7.** The skeptical [approach] is an ability to set up oppositions (δύναμις ἀντιθετική) among things that appear and things that are thought in any way whatsoever, an ability from which, because of the equipollence (ἰσοσθένειαν) in the opposed objects and arguments, we come first to suspension of judgment and after that to undisturbedness. (*PH* I 8)

> **P8.** For we do not inquire into natural phenomena (οὐ φυσιολογοῦμεν) in order to make assertions with secure confidence (μετὰ βεβαίου πείσματος ἀποφαίνεσθαι) about any of the matters dogmatically treated in relation to the inquiry into natural phenomena (τῶν κατὰ τὴν φυσιολογίαν δογματιζομένων). But we do touch on this inquiry in order to be able to oppose to every argument an equal argument and for the sake of undisturbedness. In this way, too, we approach the logical and ethical parts of so-called philosophy. (*PH* I 18)

Bett points out that in **P7** there is no reference to the skeptic's engagement in the search for truth and that this passage is in line with **P8**.[25] In this connection, it should be noted that de Olaso (1983: 53; 1988: 25–26), Palmer (2000: 366), and Włodarczyk (2000: 57) remark that, in **P1** and **P2**, Sextus is careful not to mention truth as the object of the skeptic's ongoing inquiry.

The solution to the third problem proposed by most interpreters faces at least three serious difficulties. The first is that Sextus makes it entirely clear that the full-blown skeptic's investigation is truth-directed. Note, to begin with, that **P1** does not say that Pyrrhonism differs from the other two kinds of philosophy in that the Pyrrhonist has ceased to investigate philosophical matters with the aim of finding the truth about them, but in that he is still engaged in the same investigation. The natural way of construing the comparison between the three kinds of philosophy is that their champions share the same activity, the same object of investigation, and the same aim, but differ in the results they have so far obtained. Otherwise, the very idea of the *continuation* of the investigation would make no sense. Imagine a physician who runs multiple tests on a large number of patients with the aim of discovering the cause of a disease. If he tells you that he claims neither to have discovered the cause of the disease nor that it cannot be found, but that he keeps on investigating, what he clearly means is that he is still trying to discover the cause of the disease. In addition, as Casey Perin remarks, if the activity in which the skeptic is still engaged is not the search for truth, "it would not come to an end, as it does, once the person engaged in it thinks, as the Dogmatist does, that he has discovered either the truth about the matter being investigated or that the truth about this matter can't be discovered" (2018: 118). It might be argued that, whereas the full-fledged Pyrrhonist continues the investigation both in the sense that he keeps engaged in the same activity as the prospective Pyrrhonist and in the sense that the object of that activity is the same, its goal is now different. That is to say, the full-fledged Pyrrhonist continues to examine the conflicting dogmatic arguments not to find the truth about the matters on which these arguments bear, but to create a situation of equipollence that

[25] I will examine **P7** and **P8** below.

will induce suspension, which in turn will make it possible to maintain undisturbedness. In reply, note, first, that in **P1** there is no indication that there is such a fundamental change. But second, and more importantly, if the goal of the investigative activity were changed, what would this activity consist in exactly? The very activity of investigation seems to consist in trying to determine whether any of the conflicting views on *p* is correct or where the truth concerning *p* lies. After repeatedly obtaining the same result, the Pyrrhonist may well expect to find himself in a state of suspension after each new investigation, and he may well desire that to occur if he continues to see undisturbedness as a mental state that is worth attaining and that might continue to accompany suspension. But such an expectation and such a desire entail neither that the Pyrrhonist is no longer concerned with the truth about the matters under investigation nor that he discounts the possibility of ever finding it.

Note, in addition, that the passages describing the Pyrrhonist's philosophical journey (**P4**–**P6**, but also *AM* I 6, to be quoted below) tell us that he approached philosophy to investigate which of the conflicting appearances is true and which is false. If he continues to be engaged in this investigation, then he continues to be embarked on the project of determining whether any of the conflicting appearances is to be preferred to the others because of its being true. Also, in **P3** Sextus remarks that the skeptics continue to investigate because they do not know how things are in their nature and because they have not made a discovery. Thus, the continuation of the investigation means to keep trying to know or discover what things are really like: to investigate the objects is to investigate how they are in their nature. By saying, in **P3**, that the reason why every investigation is undertaken is *still* present for the skeptic, Sextus makes it clear that the full-fledged skeptic's investigation is not different from that of the prospective skeptic. *Pace* Palmer (2000: 368–369), I find no grounds whatsoever for claiming that in **P3** Sextus is not describing the goal of the skeptic's own inquiry but merely arguing *ad hominem*. For, in that text, Sextus is responding to an objection raised to the skeptic by explaining how it is that the skeptic can remain engaged in inquiry, and his explanation is in perfect accord not only with what we are told in **P1**, but also with his account of the skeptic's non-doxastic assent to appearances (*PH* I 13, 19)—a subject to which I will return in the next chapter.

It should also be remarked that, if the skeptic's inquiring activity consisted in producing oppositions among equipollent arguments with the aim of inducing suspension and then undisturbedness, then texts such as the following would make no sense at all:

P9. And when we investigate whether the underlying object is such as it appears, we grant that it appears, and we do not investigate what appears (τοῦ φαινομένου) but what is said about what appears; and this is different from investigating what appears itself. For example, it appears to us that honey sweetens. This we concede, for we are perceptually sweetened (γλυκαζόμεθα […] αἰσθητικῶς). But whether, in addition, it is sweet as far as the argument goes, is something we investigate; that is not what appears but what is said about what appears. (*PH* I 19–20)

P10. We say, then, that the criterion of the skeptical approach is what appears, implicitly meaning by this the appearance (τὴν φαντασίαν); for given that this appearance lies

> in feeling and involuntary affection (πείσει […] καὶ ἀβουλήτῳ πάθει), it is not subject to investigation (ἀζήτητος). Hence, probably no one will dispute whether the underlying object appears this way or that; rather, what is investigated is whether it is such as it appears. (*PH* I 22)

Investigating whether the underlying object is such as it appears to be is an epistemic enterprise: the skeptic wants to discover, to the best of his ability, what is really the case. If his inquiry were not an epistemic activity, then he would limit himself to noticing that, e.g., honey appears sweet to some but bitter to others (see *PH* I 101, 211, 213, II 63) and that both appearances strike him as being of equal strength. Instead, the skeptic scrutinizes whether honey is really sweet or bitter (or both or neither),[26] and so he is in the business of searching for the truth about honey.

Lastly, if the skeptic's inquiry were not truth-directed, it would be difficult to explain the following two passages, in which Sextus is offering some initial remarks about the criterion of truth and exploring the notion of proof:

> **P11.** The investigation of the criterion is everywhere contentious, not only because the human being is by nature a truth-loving animal, but also because [in this investigation] the most generic schools of philosophy make judgments about the most important matters. For either the big and solemn boast of the dogmatists will need to be utterly done away with, if no standard of the true reality of things is discovered, or, conversely, the skeptics will be convicted of being rash and of boldly attacking the common belief, if something comes to light that is able to guide us towards the apprehension of the truth (ὡς προπετεῖς ἐλεγχεσθαι τοὺς σκεπτικοὺς καὶ τῆς κοινῆς πίστεως κατατολμήσαντας, ἐὰν φαίνηταί τι τὸ δυνάμενον ἡμᾶς ἐπὶ τὴν τῆς ἀληθείας κατάληψιν ὁδηγεῖν). (*AD* I 27)

> **P12.** But we do not say firmly [that proof is apprehended by philosophical argument], since it would be ludicrous to be still investigating (ἔτι ἐπιζητεῖν) it if we have conceded its reality, but that it turns out to be like this according to its conception. (*AD* II 321)

If the Pyrrhonist were not engaged in an inquiry that aims to discover whether there is a criterion of truth, it would not make any sense for Sextus to say in **P11** that, if the investigation of the criterion resulted in the discovery that there is a standard that makes it possible to apprehend the truth, the Pyrrhonist would be convicted of having attacked the common belief that there is such a criterion and that it can be found. The reason for his criticism of that belief is that it appears to him that, thus far, there is no compelling evidence one way or the other. As for **P12**, the only way to make sense of the remark that, if the Pyrrhonist already accepted the reality of proof, his ongoing inquiry into proof would be pointless, is by interpreting his investigation of proof as consisting in the examination of the epistemic credentials of the dogmatic views on proof with the aim of discovering the truth about whether there is such a thing as proof.[27]

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[26] As we will see in Chap. 5, Sextus excludes neither of the possibilities in parentheses.

[27] In a passage parallel to **P2**, Diogenes Laertius remarks: "All of these were called 'Pyrrhonists' because of their master, but 'aporetics', 'inquirers', 'suspenders', and even 'investigators' because of their dogma, so to speak. Their philosophy was then 'investigative' because of their constantly

The second difficulty faced by the solution proposed by most interpreters is that the skeptic's suspension results from the careful scrutiny of opposing arguments that strike him as equipollent. As we saw above, "suspension of judgment is so called from the fact that the intellect is suspended so as neither to accept nor to reject anything because of the equipollence of the matters investigated" (*PH* I 196). Equipollence is defined as "the equality with respect to credibility and lack of credibility (τὴν κατὰ πίστιν καὶ ἀπιστίαν ἰσότητα), so that none of the conflicting arguments takes precedence over any other as more credible (πιστότερον)" (*PH* I 10), and as "the equality with respect to what appears persuasive (πιθανόν) to us" (*PH* I 190; cf. DL IX 79).[28] Also, when explaining the phrase "I suspend judgment," Sextus points out that it indicates that "things appear to us equal in respect of credibility and lack of credibility. Whether they are equal, we do not affirm: we say what appears to us about them, when they make an impression on us" (*PH* I 196). Lastly, when explaining the phrase "To every argument an equal argument is opposed," he observes that it is to be understood as meaning "To every argument investigated by me that establishes something dogmatically, there appears to me to be opposed another argument, which establishes something dogmatically, equal to it in respect of credibility and lack of credibility" (*PH* I 203). By my lights, these passages show that there is both a psychological and an epistemic aspect to equipollence. Psychological, because equipollence refers to the way the skeptic is affected by the conflicting arguments: rather than affirming that they are equally persuasive or credible in an objective sense, he limits himself to reporting that they appear equipollent to him. Epistemic, because the conflicting arguments strike the skeptic as being of equal strength as far as their epistemic credentials are concerned. The investigation that has so far resulted in suspension is an epistemic activity inasmuch as, in the course of this activity, each argument's epistemic standing is weighed up in order to

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investigating the truth, 'inquisitive' because of their always inquiring and never finding, 'suspensive' because of the affection [experienced] after the investigation (I mean, the suspension of judgment), 'aporetics' because both they and the dogmatists are in *aporia*, and 'Pyrrhonian' because of Pyrrho" (DL IX 69–70). The Greek text, for which I have followed Dorandi (2013), presents a few problems, which nonetheless are not relevant to what concerns us here. (For discussion of those problems, see Barnes, 1992: 4290–4291 and Brunschwig, 1999: 1107 n. 8.) What is relevant is that the quoted passage explains the appellation 'investigative' in terms of the constant investigation of the truth. The explanation of 'inquisitive' also makes it clear that the skeptics are searching for truth, for what else would they be inquiring into but failing to find? Note that the remark that the skeptics are *always* inquiring and *never* finding is to be understood exclusively as a description of what has constantly happened to them *up to now*, not of what will definitely happen to them from now on. Otherwise, the explanation of the label 'inquisitive' would be at odds with that of 'investigative' inasmuch as the idea of constantly investigating the truth would make no sense if the skeptic already knew that he will never find it. Even though Diogenes's account of Pyrrhonism in book IX of his *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* (on which see Barnes 1992) is not always in consonance with Sextus's, I think that the quoted passage provides some support to the interpretation according to which the goal of the Pyrrhonist's investigation is to find the truth about the matters under scrutiny—if any there is.

[28] *PH* I 10 and 190, as well as *PH* I 222 and 227, show that Sextus uses πιστός as synonymous with πιθανός and πίστις as synonymous with πιθανότης. I will do the same.

determine whether any one of them is to be preferred to any other as more persuasive or credible. If this is correct, then the skeptic is not merely interested in developing an expertise in the production of equipollent arguments, but rather carries out a genuine investigation that aims to find the truth—if any there is—about the matters under scrutiny.

It might be objected that my interpretation renders the Pyrrhonist inconsistent because he cannot weigh up the epistemic credentials of conflicting arguments without implicitly endorsing some criterion of truth or justification. In reply, we should not forget, first, that the Pyrrhonist is a thinking being (*PH* I 24) and that, *qua* thinking being, he may be influenced by certain criteria of truth and justification that are common in his social and philosophical milieu, even though he refrains from endorsing them.[29] And second, this lack of endorsement of such criteria does not mean that he cannot avail himself of them to assess the epistemic standing of the conflicting arguments under investigation. Since he suspends judgment about such criteria rather than reject them, he may put them to the test to see whether they enable him to determine which view (if any) is to be preferred or whether the epistemic credentials of any given view are strong enough. The fact that he does not endorse the criteria in question does not entail that he should be utterly unimpressed by the results of their application or that he should permanently distrust the results of any rational assessment.

The third difficulty faced by the solution favored by most interpreters is that, if the Pyrrhonist's inquiry is designed to maintain suspension by producing equally powerful opposing arguments, then, when examining any issue, he will deliberately choose specific opposing arguments that, as it appears to him, might strike him as having the same strength, while ignoring others that, as it appears to him, might alter such a balance. If at some point in the course of the exercise of the skeptical ability described in **P7** the Pyrrhonist stumbled upon an argument that struck him as being more persuasive or credible than the others, he would immediately cease to attend to it, with the hope of maintaining suspension. But in doing so, he would be deceiving himself and maintaining suspension artificially. Does any of this sound reasonable as a description of the Pyrrhonist's stance? Is any of this in keeping with the open-minded attitude that Sextus's ascribes to the Pyrrhonist? When Sextus writes, e.g., that the dispute about what is up to us "remains undecidable since we have not up to now discovered a criterion of truth" (*PH* III 70) or that, since there has so far been an unresolvable disagreement about whether the sign is perceptible or intelligible, one must say that the sign is still non-evident (*AD* II 257), these remarks make no sense unless the Pyrrhonist is concerned with carrying out an open-minded inquiry into the matters under consideration, assessing the epistemic standing of all the arguments he knows of. If he deliberately set aside some of the arguments, why would he say that he has so far been unable to discover a criterion of truth or that the disagreement about the nature of the sign has as yet been unresolvable? It follows from the interpretation under consideration that, even if, e.g.,

[29] More on this in Chaps. 4 and 5.

one of the criteria of truth proposed by the dogmatists were more credible than the others, the Pyrrhonist would ignore it on purpose, and hence he would be lying because he would not have really attempted to discover the correct criterion of truth. Rather, he would have deliberately refused to consider the epistemic status of one of the dogmatic views on the criterion of truth. In that case, the reason why the Pyrrhonist has not discovered a standard of truth is simply that he has not really searched for it. All of this sounds absurd to me because the Pyrrhonist is not blind to the evidence. Moreover, if skeptical inquiry were designed to artificially induce and maintain suspension, then the skeptic's arguments and writings could be legitimately dismissed out of hand by his dogmatic rivals. Why engage the skeptics in debate or read their writings if they are not really interested in assessing the epistemic credentials of the views under scrutiny? One reason a dogmatist could read Sextus is to see whether his own positive views can withstand the skeptic's dialectical assault, regardless of what Sextus himself is up to as a skeptic. This would be a methodological use of skepticism, similar to that which is characteristic of contemporary epistemological discussions of skepticism. But note that, if the skeptic's inquiry were not an epistemic endeavor, dogmatists could rightly accuse him of being disingenuous and of not being in the business of philosophy any longer: despite remarking that he investigates whether the object is such as it appears (**P9**–**P10**), the skeptic is not actually trying to find out what is really the case.[30]

It could be objected that attributing to the rejected interpretation of Pyrrhonian inquiry the idea of artificially maintaining suspension is contentious. If it means that the skeptic does not find the opposing arguments equally balanced and yet suspends judgment anyway, then he is an incompetent skeptic because he has not really mastered the skeptical ability. If it means that he willfully ignores a stronger argument in favor of a weaker one that does the job of counterbalancing, then again he is an incompetent skeptic because he should be able to find the necessary

[30] Michael Williams (2015: 89) argues that Sextus "is certainly not an active contributor to the search for truth. If he finds the theories of the existing philosophical schools unsatisfactory, shouldn't an inquirer try to improve them or to develop some new theories of his own? Nowhere does Sextus attempt anything of the sort. His inquiry is wholly critical." It seems to me that, in order to undertake an inquiry into the truth about some question, one must have an inquisitive temperament or personality—i.e., one must manifest an interest in finding the correct answer to the question being investigated—and one must examine the available evidence bearing on the question in as open-minded or unbiased a way as possible (Machuca 2011: 252; 2013: 209; 2019a: 217–218; 2019b: 212). But this may be carried out in different ways. It does not seem that, in order to be actively engaged in the inquiry into truth, one must attempt to improve the positions one examines or to come up with positions of one's own. If the inquirer is in a state of general *aporia*, he is not likely to see a way in which he can do either of those things. He will instead analyze each position either on its own terms—by examining, e.g., its internal coherence—or by contrasting it with competing positions. This is precisely what the Pyrrhonist does and, by my lights at least, this may well count as an active and sincere engagement in the search for truth. (Note that saying that the Pyrrhonist analyzes the internal coherence of a position does not entail that he endorses a coherence theory of justification. For he does so because dogmatists themselves normally take internal coherence to be an adequate standard to assess the plausibility of a position, and he wants to ascertain whether a given position lives up to such a standard.)

counterbalancing arguments. In my view, if the exercise of the skeptical ability with respect to a given issue does not lead a skeptic to suspension, this does not necessarily mean that he is incompetent, for it is possible for an argument bearing on that issue to be stronger than its rival arguments. If the skeptic ruled out that possibility, this would mean that he believes that the truth about the matters under investigation cannot be found because there are always equally powerful arguments both pro and con any matter whatsoever, and that any competent skeptic is able to find those arguments. This is at variance with Sextus's stance, for when explaining the skeptical phrase "To every argument an equal argument is opposed," he remarks that by 'every' he means every argument he has inspected (*PH* I 202), thereby making it clear that he does not claim that every argument that might be put forward can be opposed by an equally powerful counterargument.[31]

The rejected interpretation was proposed as a solution to the third problem faced by Sextus's description of the skeptic as an inquirer into truth: why does the skeptic remain engaged in truth-oriented inquiry after having attained undisturbedness? In answering this question, we should bear in mind that there may be reasons other than the desire to attain undisturbedness for the prospective Pyrrhonist to embark on philosophical investigation (Machuca 2006: 136–137), and hence that the full-blown Pyrrhonist may have a reason to remain engaged in the inquiry into truth even after attaining undisturbedness. Casey Perin (2006, 2010) opposes those who maintain that the Pyrrhonist takes undisturbedness to be attained only through suspension and, hence, replaces the discovery of truth with suspension as the means to achieving that state of mind, with the result that he loses any interest in the search for truth. Perin correctly argues that Sextus's claim, in **P4** and **P5**, that the Pyrrhonist engaged in the search for truth with the aim of attaining undisturbedness neither amounts to nor entails the claim that the Pyrrhonist did so *only* to attain that state of mind. Sextus does not exclude the possibility that the Pyrrhonist "engages in the search for truth *both* for its own sake *and* for the sake of tranquillity" (2010: 15). If the Pyrrhonist did not have an interest in the discovery of truth for its own sake, then he would lack the motive for seeking undisturbedness. For Sextus tells us, in **P4** and **P5**, that the Pyrrhonist seeks undisturbedness because he is distressed by the unresolved conflict of appearances and, hence, by his not knowing whether *p* or not-*p* is the case. This means that the Pyrrhonist has an interest in knowing, and hence a desire to know, whether *p* or not-*p* is the case. The fact that such a desire is unsatisfied is a source of distress for him, and it is this distress that motivates his desire for undisturbedness. Thus, the Pyrrhonist's interest in knowing the truth cannot be an interest in this knowledge as a means to undisturbedness, i.e., cannot presuppose the desire for undisturbedness, since that interest is ultimately the source of this desire (2010: 24). Perin also claims that, given that the Pyrrhonist has an interest in the

[31] Mark Walker maintains that, "to undermine dogmatic belief, Pyrrhonians need to be very careful to not overshoot and make a stronger argument in favor of not-*p*" (2015: 229 n. 14). But the Pyrrhonist does not know in advance whether the arguments he will set in opposition to each other will appear equipollent to him, and if the argument in favor of not-*p* does strike him as stronger, then he will recognize this and assent to not-*p*—thus ceasing to be a Pyrrhonist.

discovery of truth for its own sake but lacks any such interest in suspension, he has a reason to prefer the former to the latter as a means to undisturbedness (2010: 23–24). Note that the view that the skeptic has an interest in truth for its own sake finds some support in the following passage, where Sextus tells us that the skeptics approached both philosophy and the disciplines with the desire to learn the truth, but suspended judgment when confronted with a conflict between equipollent positions:

> **P13.** [The skeptics] experienced the same sort of thing with regard to the disciplines (μαθημάτων) as they did with regard to the whole of philosophy. For just as they approached the latter with the desire to reach the truth, but suspended judgment when confronted with the equipollent conflict and the variation of things (ἰσοσθενεῖ δὲ μάχῃ καὶ ἀνωμαλίᾳ τῶν πραγμάτων), so too with regard to the disciplines they set out to acquire them, seeking to learn the truth here as well, but when they discovered equal *aporiai*, they did not conceal them. (*AM* I 6)

Remarkably, in **P13** there is no mention of the skeptic's pursuit and attainment of undisturbedness.[32] One may infer from this that the Pyrrhonist began to philosophize also because he had an independent interest in the discovery of truth.

Although I agree with Perin that the Pyrrhonist can, without inconsistency, continue the search for truth because he has an interest in the discovery of truth for its own sake, I have two points of disagreement with his interpretation.[33] The first concerns Perin's failure to distinguish the different stages of the skeptic's philosophical journey. With regard to the option of continuing the investigation (*PH* I 1–3), he claims that, "as Sextus indicates elsewhere (*PH* 1.12, 1.25–9), it is the Sceptic's desire for tranquillity, together with the fact that it appears to him that he can achieve tranquillity by discovering the truth, that explains why the Sceptic exercises this option" (2010: 8). This claim is no doubt inexact because, whereas at *PH* I 1–3 there is no mention of undisturbedness and Sextus is talking about the *full-blown* skeptic, at *PH* I 12 and 25–29, where the search for undisturbedness is discussed, he is talking about how the *prospective* skeptic sought to attain that state of mind. Thus, Perin seems to be conflating the beginning of the skeptic's philosophical journey, a stage at which he was still a dogmatist, and the present stage of that journey, at which he

[32] On the basis of **P13** and three other passages (*PH* I 12, 25, 232), I have elsewhere argued that neither the pursuit nor the attainment of undisturbedness should be regarded as essential to Pyrrhonism. See Machuca (2006, 2020).

[33] Other interpreters who defend the view that the skeptic is engaged in the search for truth include McPherran (1989: 165–166), Everson (1991: 125), and Hankinson (1998: 29–30). Even though she thinks that the skeptic is engaged in truth-directed inquiry, Charlotte Stough claims that he must conduct his inquiry "in a manner that bespeaks no more than openness of mind" (1984: 161) and in a way that is "passive and indirect" (1984: 162). The reason for her claim is that, like those who deny that the skeptic searches for truth (see note 24 above), she takes undisturbedness to be "scarcely compatible with the active pursuit of truth" (1984: 61). Burnyeat's (1997) position is not entirely clear to me (see note 38 below).

is already an out-and-out skeptic.[34] For this reason, I find problematic Perin's claim that "the Sceptic pursues the discovery of truth rather than suspension of judgement as a means to tranquillity" (2010: 23). For, to the best of my knowledge, nowhere does Sextus say that the *full-blown* skeptic seeks to attain undisturbedness by discovering the truth about the matters under investigation. We must bear in mind that, up to now, the skeptic has achieved undisturbedness *only* after suspending judgment, and so it non-doxastically appears to him that he will remain undisturbed if he continues to suspend judgment.[35] Of course, he does not rule out the possibility that this will change in the future, but from this we cannot infer that he prefers the discovery of truth to suspension of judgment as a means to undisturbedness.

My second disagreement with Perin concerns his interpretation of a Sextan argument he calls "the value argument" (2010: 13). According to this argument, if one believes that something is good, one will be disturbed if one lacks it, and otherwise disturbed by the prospect of losing it; and if one believes that something is bad, one will be disturbed if one has it, and otherwise disturbed by the prospect of getting it (*PH* I 27–28, III 237–238). Whereas in **P4** and **P5** we are told that what produces distress is the fact that one does not know whether something is, e.g., good or bad, at *PH* I 27–28 and III 237–238 we are told that what produces distress is having the belief that something is good or bad. In Perin's view, not only is the value argument "very much like a piece of dogmatism" (2010: 13), but also Sextus should discard it because it is incompatible with the search for truth. For in those cases in which a person is disturbed by his holding beliefs about anything being good or bad by nature, undisturbedness can be achieved only through suspension insofar as any belief of that sort produces distress, even if it is "a true belief formed as a result of investigation on the basis of considerations that establish its truth" (2010: 13). In such cases, discovering the truth about the value of something, and thus forming the belief that it is good or bad, is not a means but an obstacle to undisturbedness (2010: 25). Although I agree with Perin that there is some degree of tension here between epistemic and practical goals, I think that there are four reasons why the value argument should not be discarded.

The first reason is that it is not "a piece of dogmatism" because it is not to be interpreted as an argument the Pyrrhonist believes to be sound. Rather, it is to be interpreted as a dialectical argument when he uses it while engaging the dogmatists in debate, and as a report of the way things appear to him when he is describing his own experience. In neither case is there any reason for the Pyrrhonist not to say that

[34] Perin himself at certain points distinguishes between the person who *becomes* a skeptic and the person who *is already* a skeptic (2010: 14, 17). Although nowhere does Sextus distinguish between the prospective skeptic and the full-blown skeptic, this distinction is in perfect accord with his account of why the skeptic began to do philosophy and how he ended up suspending judgment. Let me also note that the reason why I say that the prospective skeptic is a dogmatist is that, although he is in a state of *aporia* regarding which appearances are true and which are false, he still believes, as observed in the preceding section, that there is a truth about the matters under investigation and that it can be apprehended.

[35] Needless to say, the skeptic does not believe that there is a causal connection between suspension and undisturbedness (see, e.g., Machuca 2006: 116–117).

those who hold evaluative beliefs are disturbed: if the argument succeeds in counterbalancing the arguments advanced by the dogmatists, then it is dialectically effective; and if the report strikes him as an accurate description of the way things appear to him, then he would be lying if he said something different.

The second reason is that the value argument fits well with Perin's explanation of the source of the prospective Pyrrhonist's disturbance. Perin maintains, as we saw, that the prospective Pyrrhonist seeks undisturbedness because he is disturbed, and that he is disturbed because he desires to know the truth for its own sake but has been unable to satisfy such a desire. I think there is a reason for his desire to discover the truth. I have elsewhere argued that, in Sextus's works, it is possible to identify three sources of doxastic disturbance—namely, the existence of unresolved conflicts of appearances, the holding of beliefs in general, and the holding of evaluative beliefs in particular—and that they are actually related.[36] First, the prospective skeptic was distressed by the existence of unsettled conflicts of appearances because he believed this to be something bad, the reason being that he took the discovery of truth to be something valuable. Second, holding non-evaluative beliefs (understanding belief in *p* as taking *p* to be true) is a source of disturbance only insofar as one also holds the belief that believing what is true is of objective value. If this is correct, then dogmatists take having true beliefs and avoiding false ones to be something good: approaching the truth about the matters under investigation is an aim that is taken to be of intrinsic and real value. My suggestion is, then, that the prospective skeptic desires to know the truth about the matters into which he inquires because he believes that knowledge of the truth is something good, and so becomes distressed when failing to acquire that knowledge, i.e., that good.[37] Hence, I think Perin is wrong in saying that, "when [the Sceptic] has suspended judgement about the

[36] See Machuca (2019b). Cf. Machuca (2011: 253; 2013: 209; 2019a: 216 n. 17).

[37] Bett (2020: 11 n. 11) rejects my distinction in Machuca (2019b) between three rather than two sources of doxastic disturbance on the grounds that the existence of unresolved conflicts of appearances and the holding of non-evaluative beliefs actually amount to the same thing: "The person who is troubled by not having been able to decide among the conflicting appearances no doubt has a number of beliefs, along with an uncomfortable sense that these beliefs may not be anchored in the nature of things; the beliefs and the unresolved inquiry are both parts of a single package. And when Sextus speaks of *ataraxia* following from a generalized suspension of judgment (*PH* 1.26, 29), he can quite well be read as referring to this person's withdrawal from *both* the attempt to decide among the appearances *and* to their withdrawal from the beliefs that they hold in this state of uncomfortable uncertainty." In reply, let me first remark that, whereas the reason why the prospective Pyrrhonist is disturbed by his inability to resolve conflicts of appearances is that he regards the failure to discover the truth as bad, the reason why he is disturbed by his holding non-evaluative beliefs is that he regards believing what is true as good. Second, although the prospective Pyrrhonist believes that there is a truth and that knowing it is of objective value, he does not hold beliefs about the issues regarding which he has conflicting appearances because he is in state of *aporia* as to which conflicting appearances he should assent to. Third, by suspending his former beliefs, the Pyrrhonist does not abandon his attempt to resolve the conflicts of appearances inasmuch as his ongoing engagement in the inquiry into truth consists in the examination of whether any of the conflicting appearances corresponds to how things really are. Of course, Bett would not agree with this third remark because, as we saw, he does not think that the Pyrrhonist is engaged in truth-directed inquiry.

matter but is once again distressed by the fact that he does not know whether *p*, he pursues the discovery of truth rather than suspension of judgement as the means to tranquillity" (2010: 26). If the skeptic were once again troubled by the fact that he does not know whether *p*, this would mean that he is once again holding the belief that knowing the truth is of objective value, and given his past experience, it would non-doxastically appear to him that it is preferable to try to achieve undisturbedness by getting rid of that disturbing belief rather than by discovering the truth.

If my interpretation of the sources of doxastic disturbance found in Sextus's texts is on the right track, then the importance of the value argument lies in that it enables us to explain why the prospective skeptic approached philosophy: it offers the final step of Perin's explanation, which appeals to an unsatisfied desire, since it explains why the prospective skeptic desires to know the truth and hence embarks on its search.[38] But what about the full-blown skeptic's engagement in truth-directed inquiry? Since he lacks the belief that discovering the truth is good or valuable, the likely reason why he remains engaged in truth-directed inquiry is his own contingent psychological constitution: he has an inquisitive and curious temperament and personality that has been shaped by such factors as his genetics, upbringing, education, life experiences, socio-cultural milieu, and philosophical training. Just as the full-blown skeptic's desire for undisturbedness differs from that of the prospective skeptic in that the latter does, while the former does not, believe that that state of mind is valuable, so too does the full-blown skeptic's interest in philosophical investigation differ from that of the prospective skeptic in that the latter does, while the former does not, believe that knowing the truth is valuable. I propose a deflationary reading of both the full-blown skeptic's search for undisturbedness and his

[38] Myles Burnyeat points out that the skeptic is not a negative dogmatist who rules out the possibility of finding answers, but he also maintains that one must be careful about ἀταραξία: "The sceptic goes on seeking not in the sense that he has an active programme of research but in the sense that he continues to regard it as an open question whether *p* or not-*p* is the case, at least for any first-level proposition concerning real existence. But this should not mean he is left in a state of actually *wondering* whether *p* or not-*p* is the case, for that might induce anxiety. Still less should he be wondering whether, in general, contrary claims are equally balanced. For if it is a real possibility for him that they are not, that means it is a real possibility that there are answers to be found; and it will be an immense worry to him, as it was at the very beginning of his sceptical education, that he does not know what these answers are" (1997: 56). By my lights, Burnyeat's misidentification of the ultimate source of doxastic disturbance makes him offer an inconsistent account of Pyrrhonian inquiry. If the Pyrrhonist does not actually wonder whether *p* or not-*p* is the case, or whether the considerations in favor of *p* and not-*p* are indeed equipollent, then he does not really leave open the possibility that there are answers to be found and his inquiries are not genuinely ongoing and open-minded. The reason why such wondering does not produce anxiety in the full-fledged skeptic is that he does not believe that the discovery of the true answers is of objective value. Burnyeat also remarks that the skeptic "notes the impression things make on him and the contrary impressions they make on other people, and his own impressions seem to him no stronger, no more plausible, than anyone else's. To the extent that he has achieved *ataraxia*, he is no longer concerned to inquire which is right" (1997: 41). Here Burnyeat seems to think that the reason why the skeptic does not inquire further into which of the conflicting appearances is true is not that doing so would jeopardize his ἀταραξία, but rather that, having already achieved that goal, further inquiry is of no use inasmuch as the skeptic engaged in truth-directed inquiry only for the sake of ἀταραξία. I have already explained, in the body of the text, why such an interpretation is mistaken.

engagement in truth-directed investigation according to which these are mere preferences with which he is left after suspending judgment and to which he has no doxastic commitment.[39]

With respect to my third reason for thinking that the value argument should not be discarded, note that, if my interpretation of the real source of doxastic disturbance is correct, then if one suspends all evaluative beliefs—including the belief that discovering the truth about any matter is in itself valuable—one can still hold non-evaluative beliefs without being disturbed. Hence, if after carrying out an inquiry the Pyrrhonist discovered the truth about a non-evaluative matter, thereby acquiring a belief about what the truth regarding that matter is, he would of course cease to be a Pyrrhonist, but it seems that he would not lose his undisturbedness unless he acquired the additional belief that believing the truth in question is of objective value.

As for my final reason for disagreeing with Perin about whether the value argument should be discarded, it is worth emphasizing that the skeptic does not believe or claim to know that holding evaluative beliefs, whether true or false, is a cause of disturbance, but merely reports that that is how it appears to him to be. Insofar as he is merely reporting an appearance when referring to the obstacle to the attainment and maintenance of undisturbedness and insofar as he suspends judgment, he cannot rule out the possibility that things will not happen the way it appears to him they will happen. That is to say, it could be the case that, even if the Pyrrhonist discovered the truth about an evaluative matter or even if he discovered the truth about a non-evaluative matter and acquired the belief that knowing such a truth is of objective value, undisturbedness would not be lost. He cannot discount that possibility because it also appears to him that, up to this point, he has never found the truth—if any there is—about the matters under investigation, and hence he does not know what would happen if he did.

Let me now consider **P7** and **P8**, which Bett regards as incompatible with the engagement in truth-directed inquiry. It is true that in **P7** there is no *explicit* mention of the inquiry into truth. But note, first, that the passage does mention suspension, which, as already noted, presupposes previous inquiry inasmuch as it is a mental state reached after having carried out inquiries into the various matters about which the skeptic suspends judgment. Second, by my lights, producing oppositions among

[39] Mark McPherran (1989: 165–166), too, defends the view that the search for truth and the pursuit of undisturbedness are not incompatible. My disagreement with him concerns his claim that the skeptic's engagement in truth-oriented investigation is to be explained by his natural desire or love for truth. McPherran bases this claim on Sextus's remark that "the human being is by nature a truth-loving animal" (**P11**). I tend to think that, in making that remark, Sextus is not speaking *in propria persona*, but merely in a dialectical manner. My reasons for so thinking are, first, that the passage in question opens the discussion of whether there is a criterion of truth and Sextus may be appealing to a view commonly held by those whose positions he is about to examine. And second, the same remark is not found in the passages that describe the prospective skeptic's initial embarking on philosophical inquiry and the full-blown skeptic's ongoing engagement in that inquiry. Hence, I do not think that Sextus believes (or disbelieves) that the skeptic's interest in truth is natural and, hence, inescapable.

arguments—which includes contrasting arguments put forward by the dogmatists, coming up with new arguments to be opposed to those put forward by the dogmatists, or even coming up with new arguments both pro and con—is the skeptic's way of carrying out his inquiries. For it is in this way that he assesses the epistemic standing of the conflicting arguments. If this is so, then saying that suspension is reached after having carried out an investigation amounts to the same as saying that it is reached after having exercised the ability to produce oppositions. The exercise of this ability has thus far, because of the equipollence of the opposed arguments, resulted in suspension, which is why the exerciser of the ability is a skeptic (*PH* I 11). But it may well have a different effect in the future if one of the opposed arguments strikes the exerciser of the oppositional ability as being stronger than the others. Pyrrhonian ζήτησις consists in σκέψις understood as inquiry: it is a particular type of investigation, one that consists in the production of oppositions among arguments in order to assess the epistemic credentials of the opposed arguments. If the full-blown Pyrrhonist exercises his oppositional ability and finds the opposed items equipollent, he will remain a skeptic. If he does not find them equipollent, he will have discovered, by his own lights, the answer to one of the questions being investigated. In that case, he will no longer be a skeptic, but he might continue to use the oppositional ability in investigating other issues.

As for **P8**, if my interpretation according to which producing oppositions among arguments is the skeptic's way of carrying out his inquiries is correct, then saying that the skeptic inquires into natural phenomena "in order to be able to oppose to every argument an equal argument and for the sake of undisturbedness" is not at variance with saying that he is engaged in truth-directed inquiry. Someone might claim that the καί is epexegetic: "in order to be able to oppose to every argument an equal argument, that is, for the sake of undisturbedness." The skeptic thus opposes equal arguments to each other only because this enables him to attain undisturbedness. This interpretation cannot be correct, though: given that in the sentence in question Sextus is referring to the constitutive and the causal principles of skepticism explained in **P4**, if the καί were epexegetic, then in **P8** he would be conflating the two principles. Hence, there are two independent reasons for the skeptic's engagement in the inquiry into natural phenomena. The first reason, which refers to the main constitutive principle of skepticism, is to be explained by reference to the skeptic's inquisitive attitude, which motivates him to assess the epistemic standing of the conflicting arguments. The skeptic opposes to every argument concerning natural phenomena a rival argument that *prima facie* strikes him as equally persuasive because, by so doing in the course of his inquiry, he weighs up their epistemic credentials. He cannot rule out that, after the inquiry is completed, one of the arguments will strike him as more persuasive than its rival. Someone might object that the first sentence of **P8** makes it clear that the skeptic does not leave open the possibility of eventually arriving at a justified view as a result of his examination of the epistemic standing of the conflicting arguments. By contrast, I interpret the sentence as saying that the skeptic's aim in engaging in the inquiry into natural phenomena is not to make assertions in the manner of the dogmatists, that is, without first pondering the competing views on the matter under inquiry. As noted in the previous chapter, Sextus thinks that dogmatism is characterized by arrogance, rashness, and

self-satisfaction. The reason is that, by his lights, dogmatists hold fast to their views without taking careful account of rival views.

The second reason for the skeptic's engagement in the inquiry into natural phenomena, which refers to the causal principle of skepticism, is to be explained by a desire that the skeptic happened to have and that he might cease to have while remaining a skeptic.[40] Given his past experience, it appears to him that, if after the inquiry is completed the opposing arguments strike him as equipollent and he is therefore forced to suspend judgment, he will preserve his undisturbedness. Although the skeptic has the non-doxastic expectation that undisturbedness will be maintained by producing oppositions among arguments that appear equally strong to him, **P8** presents, in my view, the two reasons as independent of each other: if one of them were abandoned, the skeptic would still engage in the inquiry into natural phenomena (or logic or ethics) because of the other. This is confirmed by the fact that, once again, the two reasons correspond to the constitutive and the causal principles of skepticism laid out in **P4**.[41]

I would now like to quote and examine two final texts that seem to run counter to my interpretation of the goal of skeptical investigation. In the first, Sextus is in the course of elucidating the skeptical phrase "To every argument an equal argument is opposed," while in the second, he explains how the skeptic proceeds in the investigation of the sign.

P14. But some also utter the phrase thus: "To every argument an equal argument is to be opposed," requesting the following as an exhortation: "To every argument that establishes something dogmatically let us oppose an argument that investigates dogmatically, equal in credibility and lack of credibility, and conflicting with it." To address their statement to the skeptic, they use the infinitive in lieu of the imperative: "to be opposed" in lieu of "let us oppose." They make this exhortation to the skeptic, lest he be somehow deceived by the dogmatist into giving up the investigation[42] and, by being rash, miss the undisturbedness apparent to them, which (as we suggested before) they think supervenes together with suspension of judgment about everything. (*PH* I 204–205)

P15. But at present one must remember the skeptical practice (τὸ σκεπτικὸν ἔθος). This is to expound the arguments against the reality of the sign not with confidence or assent (for to do such a thing would be equivalent to maintaining, like the dogma-

[40] See note 32 above.

[41] Although he is among the few interpreters who claim that the skeptic engages in truth-oriented inquiry, Perin too regards **P8** as being incompatible with the skeptic's ongoing investigation. He maintains that in **P8** "Sextus denies that the Sceptic is engaged in philosophical investigation of the natural world," that Sextus remarks that "the Sceptic is not engaged in philosophy at all" (2010: 118 n. 6), and that Sextus "writes that the Sceptic investigates topics in the various areas of philosophy […] with a view not to discovering the truth but to creating the kind of conflicts between candidates for belief that induce first ἐποχή and then tranquility" (2018: 127 n. 12). I think that, like Bett, Perin fails to realize that producing oppositions among arguments so as to weigh up their epistemic credentials is the skeptic's way of carrying out his inquiries. Sextus explicitly points out that the skeptic engages in the inquiry into natural phenomena, and *qua* skeptic he cannot carry out his inquiry by making assertions (otherwise, he would be a dogmatist), but by producing oppositions among arguments so as to evaluate their soundness.

[42] I here excise περὶ αὐτοῦ, following Annas and Barnes (2000).

> tists, that a sign exists), but so as to bring the investigation into equipollence (ὥστε εἰς ἰσοσθένειαν τὴν ζήτησιν ἄγειν), that is to say,[43] to show that it is as credible that a sign exists as that it does not, or, conversely, that it is as incredible that a sign is real as that it is unreal. For as a result equilibrium and suspension of judgment are produced in the intellect (ἡ ἀρρεψία καὶ ἡ ἐποχὴ γίνεται τῇ διανοίᾳ). And of course, because of this even he who seems to contradict us, when we say that nothing is an indicative sign, is helping us and, getting ahead of us, he himself constructs the part that should be constructed skeptically. For if the arguments against the sign compiled by the aporetics are extremely strong and almost incontrovertible, and those of the dogmatists establishing its reality are not inferior to the former, one must at once suspend judgment about its reality and not side unfairly with either party. (*AD* II 159–160)

The first thing to note is that in **P14** Sextus is reporting the way others use the phrase "To every argument an equal argument is opposed," namely, as an exhortation to the skeptic to oppose to every argument a conflicting and equally credible argument. Given that this use is different from Sextus's own use explained at *PH* I 202–203, one could argue that it cannot be taken to express his own stance on the goal of skeptical investigation. But even if we set this point aside, I do not think that **P14** unambiguously says that the skeptic's inquiry is not truth-directed. The text does give the impression that the only reason why the skeptic should not abandon his investigation is that, if he did, he would not attain across-the-board suspension, which has so far been accompanied by undisturbedness. It thus seems that the goal of skeptical investigation is not finding the truth about the matters under scrutiny, but rather inducing suspension and undisturbedness. But note that both the idea of being deceived by the dogmatists into abandoning the investigation and the idea of acting in a rash manner could be taken to indicate that the Pyrrhonist does not want to assent to a given claim without having conclusive reasons to do so. If one stops inquiring into a given matter because one has been deceived, one wrongly believes that one has made a discovery regarding that matter. And if one stops suspending judgment about whether *p* is the case because one is acting out of rashness, one assents to the claim that *p* or that not-*p* without having carefully assessed its epistemic credentials.[44] In both cases, the Pyrrhonist's concern is epistemic, not pragmatic.

P15 can be taken to undermine my interpretation of the goal of skeptical inquiry because Sextus seems to be saying that the skeptical procedure consists in bringing the investigation of the sign (or any other matter) into equipollence in order to attain suspension of judgment, and not in assessing the epistemic standing of the

[43] I interpret the καί as epexegetic.

[44] Taking into account the remarks on the dual-process theories of cognition made in Chap. 1.1, one could understand the exhortation in question as the Pyrrhonist's way of preventing System 2 from turning into beliefs the impressions or intuitions produced by System 1 without having first reached a decision about their epistemic standing.

conflicting views on the sign (or any other matter). The skeptic wants to maintain, and to induce in others, the state of suspension no matter whether the conflicting views under scrutiny are really equipollent or no matter whether they would strike him as being of unequal strength if he examined them more thoroughly. In reply, it should be noted that in **P15** Sextus's purpose is to make it clear that the skeptic does not endorse the arguments against the reality of the sign that he has put forward. And he does not endorse them because the opposing arguments appear to be of equal strength. Sextus is describing to the reader an epistemic situation in which, *qua* skeptic, he already finds himself after having assessed the epistemic standing of the arguments pro and con the reality of the sign. He is explaining to the reader how it is that the skeptic's investigation has thus far resulted in equipollence (or equilibrium) and suspension.

2.4 Conclusion

I have argued that Sextus depicts skeptical inquiry as truth-directed and that the skeptic can, without inconsistency, engage in such an inquiry. The skeptic has both epistemic and practical goals. Given that these goals are independent of each other, the skeptic's desire to maintain the state of undisturbedness does not render him blind to the epistemic standing of the opposing arguments he considers in his investigations.

In closing, let me remark that, if the skeptic decides to stop inquiring, he does not thereby stop suspending judgment. For to stop inquiring does not necessarily mean that the skeptic has made a positive or negative discovery about any of the matters he has investigated. It may just mean that he has lost interest in investigation. Suspension of judgment is thus compatible with both continuing the investigation and ceasing it. A person who has stopped inquiring may well maintain his suspensive state of mind regarding the question whether *p* as a result of his previous inquiry into whether *p*. We should bear in mind that the skeptic's engagement in inquiry is to be explained by both his second-order suspension and his inquisitive and curious temperament or personality. His second-order suspension leaves open the possibility that the truth about the matters about which he suspends judgment might be found and, hence, explains the open-mindedness with which he carries out his inquires. But what motivates him to keep investigating those matters is his inquisitive and curious temperament or personality. Now, if the skeptic ceases to be engaged in inquiry, does this mean that he is no longer a skeptic? The reply depends on whether both suspension and involvement in inquiry are essential features of the skeptical philosophy. I am inclined to answer the question in the affirmative because Sextus tells us that the skeptic's continuing engagement in investigation is what distinguishes his stance from the other two main types of philosophy (*PH* I 1–4) and

that 'investigative' is one of the appellations of the skeptical outlook (*PH* I 7).[45] Hence, the association of the skeptical stance with the activity of inquiry or investigation referred to at the beginning of this chapter is a fundamental one.[46]

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[45] Sextus's remarks that suspension is a state of mind that comes about in the skeptic after an investigation he has conducted (*PH* I 7) and that it results from the equipollence of the matters being investigated (*PH* I 196) do not seem relevant to the issue under consideration. For they refer to the investigation that has resulted in the state of suspension in which the skeptic finds himself at present, not to any future investigation the skeptic might undertake.

[46] I should emphasize that, in this chapter, I have focused on the kind of inquiry carried out by the Pyrrhonist, who is both a first- and a second-order suspender of judgment (an ἐφεκτικός). Unlike Friedman (2017: 308, 315–317), I do not claim that suspension necessarily involves having the aim or intention to answer the question about which one suspends judgment. As I argued in Sect. 2.2 in connection with Academic skepticism, one may suspend judgment about all object-level questions because one takes the truth about them to be impossible to apprehend or know. The Academic skeptic suspends judgment about those questions without having the aim or intention to answer them: even though there are answers (there is a truth about them), discovering what those answers are is not possible. For this reason, the Academic skeptic does not remain engaged in the inquiry into truth. For somewhat similar objections to Friedman's view, see Archer (2019) and Raleigh (2021).

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Chapter 3
Argumentation and Persuasiveness

Abstract This chapter has three aims. The first is to shed some light on Sextus's distinction between therapeutically "weighty" and "weak" arguments. The second aim is to determine whether the Pyrrhonist's therapeutic use of arguments is consistent with both their dialectical use and their employment in truth-directed inquiry. And the third aim is to distinguish the different senses in which arguments are characterized as persuasive by Sextus, and hence to distinguish between distinct kinds of persuasiveness.

Keywords Conceit · Dialectical argument · Epistemic persuasiveness · Psychological persuasiveness · Rashness · Therapeutic argument · Truth-directed inquiry

3.1 Introduction

The Pyrrhonist's argumentative arsenal consists of a wide variety of arguments: from sophisticated arguments that to this day pose serious epistemological challenges to arguments that are deemed to be blatantly sophistical. The arguments of which the Pyrrhonist avails himself are either put forward by his dogmatic rivals or constructed by himself. Several features characterize his argumentative practice. First, he makes a *therapeutic* use of arguments: he employs arguments that differ in their persuasiveness to cure his dogmatic patients of the distinct degrees of conceit and rashness that afflict them. Second, his arguments are *dialectical*: in debating with his dogmatic opponents, he makes use of arguments without accepting *in propria persona* their validity or soundness.[1] Third, and contrary to what the previous two features might suggest, the Pyrrhonist avails himself of arguments in his own

[1] In Chap. 1.3, I explained that a dialectical argument is an argument (i) that is employed in debate against a real or imaginary opponent, (ii) whose logical form is, or should be, recognized as valid by the opponent, and (iii) to which its proponent is not committed. I also remarked that an *ad hominem* argument is a dialectical argument whose premises are explicitly or implicitly endorsed by the opponent inasmuch as they are borrowed from his own doctrine or follow from it.

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open-minded inquiry into truth. Finally, Pyrrhonian argumentation is *oppositional*: it typically works by producing oppositions among arguments.

The present chapter has three aims. The first is to shed some light on Sextus's distinction between therapeutically "weighty" and "weak" arguments. The second aim is to determine whether the skeptic's therapeutic use of arguments is consistent with both their dialectical use and their employment in truth-directed inquiry. Although the oppositional character of skeptical argumentation will be present in the background, my attention will be focused on the other three features. The third aim is to distinguish the different senses in which arguments are characterized as persuasive by Sextus, and hence to distinguish between distinct kinds of persuasiveness.

The chapter's structure is as follows. I first offer a detailed analysis of the oft-cited closing chapter of *PH*, which presents the skeptic's therapeutic use of arguments and its philanthropic motivation. In so doing, I look at the connection between such a use and the dialectical character of the skeptic's argumentation. Then, I consider whether Sextus's description of the skeptic as an inquirer into truth is compatible with the therapeutic and the dialectical uses of arguments. Next, I address a problem posed by Sextus's account of the skeptic's therapeutic practice: the skeptical doctor seems to disregard the equipollence of opposing arguments on which his suspension rests. In looking for a solution to this problem, I distinguish between two kinds of persuasiveness and explore how certain arguments may appear persuasive to the skeptic himself without this implying any doxastic commitment on his part. In the concluding remarks, I summarize the results of the preceding analyses.

3.2 Argumentative Therapy

Under the title "Why does the skeptic sometimes deliberately propound arguments feeble in their persuasiveness (ἀμυδροὺς ταῖς πιθανότησιν)?," the closing chapter of *PH* offers a peculiar explanation of part of the skeptic's argumentative practice:

> Because he is philanthropic, the skeptic wishes to cure by argument (ἰᾶσθαι λόγῳ), as far as he can (κατὰ δύναμιν), the conceit and rashness of the dogmatists. Hence, just as the doctors of the bodily affections possess remedies that differ in potency and apply severe ones to those who are severely affected and milder ones to those who are mildly affected, so too does the skeptic propound arguments that differ in strength (διαφόρους […] κατὰ ἰσχύν). He employs weighty (ἐμβριθέσι) arguments, capable of vigorously healing the affection of conceit of the dogmatists, in the case of those who are afflicted by a severe rashness, but milder (κουφοτέροις) ones in the case of those whose affection of conceit is superficial and easy to cure, and who can be healed by a milder persuasiveness. This is why the person who is motivated by skepticism does not hesitate to sometimes propound arguments that appear weighty in their persuasiveness and sometimes, too, arguments that appear weaker (ὁτὲ μὲν ἐμβριθεῖς ταῖς πιθανότησιν, ὁτὲ δὲ καὶ ἀμαυροτέρους φαινομένους […] λόγους). He does this on purpose, since often the latter are sufficient for him to achieve his aim. (*PH* III 280–281)

The first thing to note is that this passage, which is the only one in Sextus's extant works that refers to the Pyrrhonist's therapeutic use of arguments and its philanthropic motivation, is crucial in that it explains why the Pyrrhonist intends to persuade the dogmatists.[2] For he may engage in philosophical debate and employ a wide range of arguments as a way of continuing his own inquiry into truth (on which more in Sect. 3.3), but his intention to persuade those with whom he discusses seems to require another explanation, namely, that the dogmatists are regarded as patients who need to be cured of the intellectual diseases of conceit and rashness.[3]

Second, it might be thought that Sextus is saying that some of the arguments he employs in his therapy are objectively weighty in their persuasiveness, whereas others are objectively weak, feeble, or mild. Moreover, it might be thought that Sextus is distinguishing between valid and invalid, or sound and unsound, arguments and explaining why the skeptic intentionally makes use of one or the other type of argument. In fact, several interpreters maintain that Sextus recognizes that the skeptic sometimes deliberately or knowingly employs arguments he regards as sophistical, mistaken, fallacious, invalid, or logically weak, and that this is the reason why he claims that such arguments are of mild persuasiveness.[4] By contrast, Jonathan Barnes claims that the skeptic makes use of arguments he regards as good (1988: 76–77; 2000: xxviii–xxix). In his view, at *PH* III 280–281 Sextus is not saying that the only thing that matters to the skeptic is the therapeutic efficacy of arguments, and hence that he may use arguments he knows to be faulty provided that they succeed in curing his dogmatic patients. Rather, the Pyrrhonian doctor considers his arguments to be good arguments, since the fact that he adjusts them to the condition of his patients

> does not for a moment suggest that the sceptic will try to gull his patients; that he will use on them – on some of them – arguments which he knows are faulty but which he believes will effect the therapy. If I set out to prove Euclid IV.17, I shall look for an argument which starts from true premisses and which concludes, by way of valid inferences, to IV.17. If I set out to prove to you that IV.17 is true, then I shall do exactly the same thing – with an addition: I shall look for premisses which are not merely true but also accepted by you as being true; and I shall use forms of inference which are not merely valid but also recognized by you as being valid. When I prove something to you – when I play the part of intellectual therapist – I do not relax my standards of proof in the interest of effective therapy. On the

[2] One might also think of the passages in which Sextus compares the skeptical phrases (*PH* I 206) and the arguments against proof (*PH* II 188, *AD* II 480) to purgative drugs that evacuate themselves together with the fluids they drive out of bodies. The purgative simile, however, has nothing to do with the argumentative therapy laid out at *PH* III 280–281.

[3] Regarding the relation between conceit (οἴησις) and rashness (προπέτεια), one might consider the former as the cause of the latter, even though Sextus does not explain what this relation is and even though, given his skeptical stance, he would refrain from giving a causal account of it (see Voelke, 1990: 185–186). One may assume that the dogmatist rashly assents to the conclusion of an argument that strikes him as strong because he is too confident in his cognitive abilities to assess the strength of rival arguments.

[4] See Annas (1998: 201 n. 14), Bailey (2002: 138–139), Brochard (2002: 335, 340), Thorsrud (2003: 235 n. 9; 2009: 212 n. 11), O'Keefe (2006: 388, 402), Schellenberg (2007: xi), Perin (2010: 118), Fine (2014: 383 n. 60), and Catapano (2016: 26 n. 48).

> contrary, the therapy depends on the fact that the arguments are good arguments; and it places a further constraint on them: they must not only be good but also appear to you to be good. (Barnes, 2000: xxviii–xxix)

Barnes also maintains that "philosophical drugs cure by affecting the reason, and that fact will suggest that they must be compounded from plausible premisses and with reasonable inferences. Not all cures are philosophical cures; and the Pyrrhonist, though a therapist, is also a philosopher" (1988: 77).[5]

I think that both versions of the interpretation according to which the Pyrrhonist holds views on the validity or soundness (or lack thereof) of his therapeutic arguments are mistaken. To begin with, not only is it plain, from what we learn elsewhere in Sextus, that the Pyrrhonist suspends judgment about whether his skeptical arguments are sound (e.g., *PH* I 35), but also nothing said at *PH* III 280–281 suggests either that he deliberately or knowingly employs fallacious arguments or that he takes his arguments to make use of true or plausible premises and of valid or reasonable inferences. The only attribute of arguments referred to in that passage is their therapeutic efficacy, the effects they have on those who suffer from different degrees of conceit and rashness. The comparison Barnes draws between the Pyrrhonist's arguments and the proofs of Euclid's theorems is inaccurate for two reasons. First, the person who offers a proof of one of those theorems does not regard those to whom he is proving that the theorem is true as suffering from a disease that may be cured by means of such a proof. By contrast, it appears to the Pyrrhonist that the dogmatists suffer from conceit and rashness and that they may be cured by argument, so that his concern is to find arguments capable of effecting the cure. Second, the person who offers a proof of one of Euclid's theorems believes that its premises and conclusion are true and that its logical form is valid. By contrast, the Pyrrhonian psychotherapist who employs an argument to persuade a dogmatic patient suspends judgment about both the truth of its premises and conclusion and the validity of its logical form.[6]

Note also the use of φαινομένους towards the end of the passage: Sextus does not say that some arguments *are* weighty and that others *are* weak in their persuasiveness, but only that they *appear* so. Moreover, nowhere at *PH* III 280–281 does he speak of how arguments *are*. But even if he did, we know from other passages that (i) he refrains from affirming that anything said in *PH* is just as he says it is, but merely reports how things appear to him at the moment (*PH* I 4), and that (ii) when he uses the verb εἶναι, it is to be understood in the sense of φαίνεσθαι (*PH* I 135, 198, 200; *AD* V 18–20). Hence, the Pyrrhonist's argumentative treatment should be interpreted phenomenologically: some arguments *appear* strong and others *appear* weak to him as far as their ability to persuade his dogmatic patients is concerned. None of the adjectives employed to characterize the two types of therapeutic

[5] Barnes (1988, 2000) rejects an interpretation he previously defended in his co-authored book on the Ten Modes of Aenesidemus, where it is claimed that the Pyrrhonist is not concerned with the soundness of his arguments, but rather with their efficacy (see Annas & Barnes, 1985: 50).

[6] I will say more about this in Chap. 5.

arguments (ἀμαυρός, ἀμυδρός, ἐμβριθής, κοῦφος) express objective logical or epistemic features of those arguments.

Third, by restricting himself to phenomenologically distinguishing and describing his therapeutic arguments according to their effects, not only does the skeptic abide by his suspension of judgment, but he has all he needs to apply his argumentative treatment. Given the skeptical doctor's therapeutic aim and his inability to form a judgment about the validity or invalidity, or the soundness or unsoundness, of the arguments he employs, their only 'value' left for him in the context of the argumentative treatment is their curative effects on his patients. If the skeptic's aim is to persuade certain persons by argument because their intellectual well-being seems to depend on their being thus persuaded, then what matters from a pragmatic point of view is the therapeutic effects of the arguments he employs, regardless of what he himself thinks of the logical or epistemic features of those arguments. What ultimately matters is how those being treated view the argumentative drugs the skeptic is supplying to them. It is perfectly possible that a therapeutic argument that is valid or sound according to traditional logical and epistemological standards will be viewed as invalid or unsound by a given patient, who will thereby remain unpersuaded, and hence uncured. It is equally possible that another therapeutic argument, despite being invalid or unsound by those same standards, will be viewed as valid or sound by the patient in question, who will thereby be persuaded and cured.[7] In such cases, if one's sole aim is to persuade the person with whom one is discussing because on this persuasion seems to depend his intellectual well-being, then the only attribute of arguments that really matters and, hence, that one has to take into account is their therapeutic effects. We therefore see here how the skeptic's therapeutic use of arguments relates to his dialectical use of them. The former hinges on the latter: in order for his argumentative drugs to be effective, the skeptical therapist must take into account what his patients think of the premises, conclusions, and logical forms of the arguments he puts forward. Thus, the dialectical arguments the skeptic applies in his intellectual therapy are typically *ad hominem*. When administering the argumentative treatment to his patients, the skeptic typically makes use of premises that are already accepted by the patient he is treating because this might make it easier for the cure to occur. However, he may also avail himself of premises that he himself has come up with or that are endorsed by some other patient, but that are likely to strike the patient under treatment as being as persuasive as the premises of the argument advanced by the latter. If the interpretation defended here is correct, then the skeptic can apply such a personalized treatment despite the fact that he does not accept *in propria persona* the premises, conclusions, and logical forms of his therapeutic arguments. Someone might object that, if the skeptic does not endorse his therapeutic arguments, then they will not be able to persuade his dogmatic

[7] There are of course other factors, besides the validity or the soundness of an argument, that may determine whether or not it persuades a person, such as the reputation of the individual who puts forward the argument, the relevance or interest of the subject for the person to be persuaded, the latter's educational level, his intellectual skills, and his emotional state.

patients. In reply, note that whether someone is persuaded by a given argument does not necessarily depend on whether the person who puts forward the argument believes it to be valid or sound. For example, if an academic is presented with an argument by a colleague, he may come to the conclusion that the argument is valid or sound, thereby being persuaded by it, even though he does not know what his colleague thinks of the argument, or even though he knows that his colleague finds the argument invalid or unsound, or even though he knows that his colleague suspends judgment about the argument's validity or soundness. It should also be noted that, even if the skeptic deemed some arguments to be invalid or unsound, his therapeutic procedure would make perfect sense. For if his intention is to cure his patients of their disease of dogmatism, then in the context of the argumentative treatment his sole criterion for choosing certain arguments is their persuasive efficacy, and so he would make use of invalid or unsound arguments if they had the desired therapeutic effect on his patients.

Fourth, at the beginning of *PH* III 280, Sextus tells us that the Pyrrhonist wishes to cure by argument his patients' rashness and conceit κατὰ δύναμιν, which is standardly rendered as "as far as he can" or similar expressions. With that phrase, Sextus is expressing humility and caution: he does not affirm that his argumentative therapy has worked on every occasion, and he cannot assure us that it will be effective for every, or indeed any, future patient afflicted by conceit and rashness. Sextus thus recognizes that the Pyrrhonist's arguments have failed, and will perhaps fail, to induce certain people to abandon their beliefs and suspend judgment;[8] he does not even believe that there is always an argument that is capable of inducing suspension.[9] Perhaps he observed that, in some cases, his arguments were able to reduce his patient's degree of belief in p, but not to the point of making his patient believe in p to degree 0.5 or close to 0.5, which is the degree commonly taken to correspond to suspension. Hence, on any new patient the Pyrrhonist might use both arguments that have so far proven to be effective and arguments that have not.

Finally, what is the skeptic's criterion for distinguishing between weak and weighty therapeutic arguments? As noted above, the criterion is not the logical or epistemic features of those arguments. One possible candidate is the number of patients an argument can persuade: weak arguments are those that can persuade only a few patients, whereas weighty arguments are those that can persuade most or all patients (cf. Barnes, 2000: xxviii; Powers, 2010: 170 n. 19). How does this distinction fit in with that between different degrees of conceit and rashness? Given that Sextus tells us that weighty arguments are those capable of persuading the patients who are severely affected by conceit and rashness, whereas weak arguments are those capable of persuading the patients who are mildly affected by such conditions, we should conclude that the former arguments persuade a large number

[8] Although at *PH* III 280–281 Sextus does not say that the skeptic intends to induce suspension in his patients, it seems clear that the skeptic's intention is to put forward arguments that his patients will judge to be as strong as the arguments that they themselves put forward.

[9] I therefore disagree with Jérôme Laurent's claim that *PH* III 280 makes it clear that Sextus "ne doute pas de l'efficacité du *logos*" (1993: 655).

of patients, whereas the latter persuade only a small number of them. The problem with this proposal is that it is possible that an argument capable of persuading highly conceited patients who have a strong tendency to make rash judgments might be unable to persuade those who are less conceited and have a weaker tendency to make such judgments, and hence unable to persuade a large number of patients. In fact, at *PH* III 280–281, we find no indication that an argument capable of persuading a highly conceited patient who has a strong inclination to judge rashly is an argument capable of persuading many patients, nor that an argument capable of persuading a mildly conceited patient who is less inclined to judge rashly is an argument capable of persuading only a few of them.

Another candidate that has been suggested as the criterion for distinguishing between therapeutic arguments is the number of beliefs targeted by them (Barnes, 1990b: 2691; Hankinson, 1994: 68; Marchand, 2019: 275–276). In that case, the arguments that appear to be of mild persuasive power would be those that target only a restricted set of beliefs, whereas the arguments that appear to be of high persuasive power would be those that have a wider scope. This means that the patients who are mildly affected by conceit and rashness are those who can be cured by arguments that target a few beliefs, whereas the patients who are severely affected by such conditions are those who can be cured by arguments that target most or all beliefs. The problem with this proposal is that it is possible both that a person is severely affected by conceit and rashness with regard to a small number of beliefs, and that another person is slightly affected by such conditions with regard to a large number of beliefs. For example, the former person may be affected by a high degree of conceit only vis-à-vis political beliefs, so that he makes many rash judgments mostly about politics, whereas the latter person may be affected by a low degree of conceit not only vis-à-vis political beliefs, but also vis-à-vis religious, moral, metaphysical, and aesthetical beliefs, so that he makes a small number of rash judgments in several areas. In the former case, the skeptical doctor would probably first deploy from among his battery of arguments all those which call into question only political beliefs and see whether they are persuasive enough to counterbalance the patient's beliefs; and only if they were not, he would appeal to far-reaching arguments. In the latter case, he would probably first use a few wide-ranging arguments to dislodge the various kinds of beliefs in question; and only in the event he failed would he avail himself of different sets of arguments, each targeting a specific area. If in the former case the narrow arguments were effective, they would be regarded as weighty according to the distinction made at *PH* III 280–281 because they would cure the high degree of conceit and rashness that afflict the patient, but they would be regarded as weak according to the distinction under consideration because they would be arguments whose scope would be circumscribed to beliefs about a specific topic. If in the latter case the wide-ranging arguments were effective, they would be considered weak according to the distinction made at *PH* III 280–281 because they would cure a patient who is mildly affected by conceit and rashness, but they would be considered weighty according to the distinction under consideration because they would be arguments targeting beliefs about various topics. Thus, neither does the second candidate that has been suggested as the criterion for distinguishing

between therapeutic arguments fit in with the distinction presented at *PH* III 280–281.

What is then the touchstone for discriminating between weak and weighty therapeutic arguments? The only touchstone mentioned in the closing chapter of *PH* is the severity of the intellectual diseases that the arguments can cure. The taxonomy of therapeutic arguments is therefore based on a description of their curative power: the Pyrrhonian doctor observes that there is a difference between them regarding their efficacy in curing the various degrees of conceit and rashness that afflict his dogmatic patients. He notices both that those who are highly conceited and have a strong tendency to make rash judgments are hard to persuade, so that the arguments capable of persuading them strike him as strong in their persuasiveness, and that the patients who are less conceited and who are more cautious when making judgments are more easily persuaded, so that the arguments capable of persuading this latter group of patients but not the former strike him as weak in their persuasiveness. The Pyrrhonian therapist does not attempt to explain why his arguments have these different therapeutic effects but limits himself to observing and reporting that they do. When he treats a new patient who is mildly conceited and is not much inclined to make rash judgments, he employs some of the arguments that have so far proven capable of persuading that kind of patient; and when he treats a new patient who is severely affected by conceit and has a strong inclination to make rash judgments, he avails himself of the arguments that have so far proven capable of persuading that type of patient. When administering the argumentative drugs in those ways, the Pyrrhonian doctor does not claim that what has worked in the past will work in the future, but merely follows the way things appear to him.

3.3 Truth-Directed Inquiry

In Chap. 2, I addressed, and proposed a solution to, three of the problems faced by Sextus's portrayal of the Pyrrhonist as an inquirer into truth. In this section, I would like to address a fourth problem: truth-directed inquiry does not seem compatible with the dialectical and the therapeutic uses of arguments. In the case of the former use, the reason why the Pyrrhonist counters his rivals' arguments is not of course that he has discovered an answer to a question that is different from the answers his rivals claim to have discovered. But neither is he trying to find out whether his rivals' arguments are epistemically stronger than his dialectical arguments or *vice versa*. Rather, he employs every argument at his disposal with the sole purpose of generating equipollence between conflicting arguments, thereby inducing suspension of judgment. As for the therapeutic use of arguments, it shows that every use of an argument made by the Pyrrhonist is wholly pragmatic in that he is not concerned with whether any of the arguments he utilizes would make it possible to discover the truth about the topics being discussed. What matters is whether dialectical arguments are therapeutically effective, not whether they are sound. Now, if one takes Sextus at his word and, hence, does not think that he is disingenuous in his

description of the Pyrrhonist's ongoing inquiry, then one should make a serious attempt to show that the dialectical and the therapeutic uses of arguments are not actually incompatible with their use in truth-directed investigation, or at least that the tension between those uses is not as serious as one might think.

With respect to the dialectical use of arguments, it should be noted that the fact that, when faced with an argument for *p*, the Pyrrhonist constructs a countervailing argument for not-*p* using premises and inference rules to which he is not doxastically committed does not entail that he does not carefully and open-mindedly assess the strength of the arguments on both sides. Given that the dogmatists claim to have discovered the correct answers to many questions, the Pyrrhonist tests those answers using all the tools at his disposal, including the doctrines, rules of inference, and criteria of justification accepted by those who claim to know or who present themselves as experts. If the dogmatic positions were as strong as they are said to be, then it may be assumed that they would withstand the Pyrrhonian dialectical arguments. The Pyrrhonist does not know in advance whether his rivals' arguments will turn out to be stronger than his dialectical arguments or *vice versa*, or whether the arguments on both sides will strike him as equipollent. If these considerations are on the right track, then the Pyrrhonist can make use of dialectical arguments in his truth-oriented inquiries.

What about the therapeutic use of arguments? Casey Perin maintains that it has little to do with the central features of Pyrrhonism, being incompatible particularly with the search for truth. For the Pyrrhonist who is a therapist is concerned with the pragmatic rather than the epistemic value of an argument, given that he is not concerned with whether it "establishes the truth of its conclusion and, by doing so, resolves a conflict between candidates for belief" (2010: 121). Along similar lines, Stéphane Marchand claims that the final chapter of *PH* makes it clear that the aim of the Pyrrhonist's argumentation "n'est pas la découverte de la vérité, ni la production d'une conviction, mais l'efficacité" (2019: 279). Although both interpreters take the therapeutic use of arguments to be incompatible with truth-oriented inquiry, Marchand does not see this as a problem because, unlike Perin, he does not believe that the Pyrrhonist is engaged in the search for truth. While I recognize that there seems to be a tension between the Pyrrhonist's psychotherapy and his inquiry into truth, I do not think that they are incompatible.

Let me first remark that, by my lights, the philanthropy that motivates the Pyrrhonist's argumentative therapy is not essential to his stance (see Machuca, 2006: 131–132, 134–136). Neither do I think that his therapeutic use of arguments, no matter what motivation it might have, is a central feature of his skepticism (cf. Machuca, 2013a: 222). It is also true that, as noted earlier, *PH* III 280–281 is the only passage of Sextus's surviving writings that refers to the Pyrrhonist's argumentative therapy, and in this respect it can be viewed as some sort of anomaly.[10]

[10] Richard Bett maintains that *PH* III 280–281 is "an anomaly" and talks about "the incongruity between this passage and the rest of the work" (2011: 15 with n. 21). He remarks: "[If Sextus] is really interested in converting other people to skepticism, then the fact that skepticism's practical attitudes will strike most people as very unattractive is at least prima facie a problem. On the other

Nevertheless, none of the foregoing points implies that the therapeutic use of arguments is at variance with the Pyrrhonian outlook.[11] Moreover, in the preceding section, we saw that it is compatible with the Pyrrhonist's dialectical style of argumentation.

As argued in the previous chapter, the explicit purpose of the Pyrrhonist's inquiries is to find the truth (if any there is) about the topics under investigation (*PH* I 2–3, II 11), and the main way in which he carries out his inquiries is by exercising the skeptical ability (*PH* I 8), i.e., by producing oppositions among arguments so as to assess their strength. Now, if for whatever reason a Pyrrhonist happens to care about other people's well-being and if it appears to him both that having certain dispositions has unwelcome consequences and that arguments may have a positive effect on those who have such dispositions, then he may decide to make, in addition, a therapeutic use of arguments. There is no reason to think that these therapeutic arguments, which are addressed to others, interferes with the epistemic use of them that the Pyrrhonist makes in his own inquiries, which he undertakes because of his inquisitive temperament or personality. But we should also bear in mind that the reason the Pyrrhonist administers his argumentative drugs to the dogmatist is that the latter is so confident in his cognitive abilities that he rashly assents to the conclusion of an argument without (properly) assessing the strength of rival arguments. If that is so, then it seems that conceit and rashness represent an obstacle to the dogmatist's search for truth because they hinder careful inquiry, in which case the Pyrrhonist's argumentative therapy has both a pragmatic and an epistemic aim. Now, if truth-directed inquiry is regarded as a collective or cooperative endeavor, then it may be argued that the dogmatist's conceit and rashness also represent an obstacle to the Pyrrhonist's own investigations. Thus, even if the therapeutic use of arguments, as described in the closing chapter of *PH*, is entirely focused on the dogmatic patient's intellectual well-being, not only does it not interfere with the Pyrrhonist's own truth-directed inquiry, but the former could in principle contribute to the latter.

To sum up: (i) the Pyrrhonist's truth-directed inquiry and argumentative therapy are independent activities, which nonetheless does not mean that they are incompatible, and (ii) even though his therapeutic use of arguments happens to be motivated by a philanthropic attitude, (iii) his interest in truth-directed inquiry could in

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hand, this closing chapter seems to be something of an anomaly, and in general Sextus does not seem particularly concerned about whether non-skeptics pay attention to him" (2011: 15 with n. 21). It is true that, if a skeptic happens to be philanthropic and it appears to him that dogmatism is some sort of intellectual disease, then it is a practical problem if most dogmatists do not like his argumentative treatment or its effects. But this does not necessarily mean that it makes no sense to attempt to cure them all the same: quite a few of the things we do in life face the same kind of practical difficulty. Note also that, insofar as Sextus cares to write voluminous works expounding the Pyrrhonian outlook and engaging with the dogmatists' views, he does seem to be concerned about non-skeptics paying attention to what he has to say.

[11] For reasons he does not specify, Benson Mates (1996: 314) claims that Sextus is not the author of *PH* III 280–281. There is, however, no reason whatsoever to excise the chapter as a later interpolation.

principle be a reason to make a therapeutic use of arguments as a strategy that would contribute to better conduct such an inquiry conceived of as a collective or cooperative endeavor.

3.4 Two Kinds of Persuasiveness

Even if one stresses the phenomenological character of the taxonomy of therapeutic arguments so as to show its compatibility with the skeptic's refusal to make assertions about how things really are, a problem seems to remain. Note that an argument capable of persuading a mildly conceited patient and an argument capable of persuading a highly conceited patient may be conflicting. According to *PH* III 280–281, the latter argument appears weightier in its persuasiveness than the former. The problem arises because, time and again, Sextus says that the conflicting arguments that the skeptic has so far considered appear equally credible or persuasive to him, which is what induces suspension in him.[12] Hence, the taxonomy of arguments presented in the closing chapter of *PH* seems to be at odds with the skeptical stance because it follows from it that conflicting arguments may differ in their persuasiveness (cf. Voelke, 1990: 182).[13]

The inconsistency in question is, however, merely apparent. First, it could be argued that, when speaking of the equipollence of conflicting arguments, Sextus is referring, not to *individual* arguments pro and con *p*, but to the *totality* of arguments pro and con *p*. Even if individual arguments belonging to one group may appear stronger or weaker than individual arguments belonging to the opposite group, the groups taken together appear equipollent. Although I find this view plausible, at *PH* I 10 Sextus explicitly remarks that none of the arguments on one side appears more credible or persuasive than any argument on the other side (cf. *PH* I 223, 232). But even if this is not the case for all arguments, it is possible that, given two opposing arguments that appear equally persuasive to the skeptic, one of them is to be considered weighty and the other weak according to the taxonomy laid out at *PH* III 280–281. I therefore think that the final solution to the problem under consideration consists in noting that, in the passages in which Sextus speaks of the apparently equal credibility or persuasiveness of the opposing arguments the skeptic has so far examined, what he means is that none of those arguments appears more credible or persuasive than any other as far as its ability to capture the nature of things is concerned. That is to say, the context of those passages is epistemic, since therein

[12] See, e.g., *PH* I 8, 10, 190, 196, 203, passages that were all quoted in the preceding chapter.

[13] In the chapter of the first book of *PH* that discusses the differences between Pyrrhonism and the philosophy of the Academy, Sextus explicitly remarks that preferring one appearance to another as being more persuasive or credible, or claiming that some appearances are persuasive and others unpersuasive, is incompatible with being a Pyrrhonist (*PH* I 222–223, 225–227, 232).

credibility and persuasiveness refer to truth.[14] By contrast, at *PH* III 280–281 the difference in the persuasiveness of arguments is not based on the extent to which they capture the nature of things, but on their *de facto* ability to persuade highly or mildly conceited dogmatists. Given that from an epistemic point of view conflicting arguments appear equipollent, but from a therapeutic point of view some may appear stronger than others, at *PH* III 280–281 Sextus does not contradict what he says elsewhere about conflicting arguments appearing equally persuasive or credible to the skeptic.

It should be noted, however, that there is a sense in which certain arguments may appear more persuasive than others to the skeptic. This kind of persuasiveness is different from the epistemic persuasiveness referred to above. Sextus explicitly distinguishes both between two senses in which one can say that one is persuaded of something and between two corresponding types of assent. Regarding the first distinction, after presenting the three types of persuasive appearance (πιθανὴ φαντασία) distinguished by the neo-Academics (*PH* I 227–229), Sextus remarks that, when the Pyrrhonists and the neo-Academics say that they are persuaded of certain things (πείθεσθαί τισιν), they mean different things. For the verb πείθεσθαι may mean either (i) "not resisting but simply following (ἕπεσθαι) without strong propensity or inclination" or (ii) "assenting to something by choice and, as it were, sympathy due to strong desire" (*PH* I 230). Whereas the neo-Academics "say, with a strong propensity, that they are persuaded and that something is persuasive," the Pyrrhonists "say so in the sense of simply yielding (ἔκειν) without inclination" (*PH* I 230). This difference is clear in Greek, since πείθεσθαι + dative means either "to obey" or "to believe," the former corresponding to sense (i) above and the latter to sense (ii).

As for the second distinction, in the chapter of *PH* in which he addresses the question whether the Pyrrhonist dogmatizes (δογματίζει), Sextus tells us the Pyrrhonist dogmatizes only if dogma means "acquiescing (εὐδοκεῖν) in something; for the Pyrrhonist assents to the affections forced upon him by an appearance—for example, when heated or chilled, he would not say 'I think I am not heated or chilled'" (*PH* I 13, cf. *PH* I 29). Referring back to this passage, Sextus later remarks that the Pyrrhonist does not overturn "the things that, in accordance with a passive appearance (κατὰ φαντασίαν παθητικήν), lead us involuntarily to assent—and those are the things that appear (τὰ φαινόμενα)" (*PH* I 19, cf. *PH* I 193). This kind of assent consists merely in acknowledging that things presently appear to one in certain ways (Burnyeat, 1997: 43). By contrast, the Pyrrhonist does not dogmatize if "dogma is assent to one of the non-evident matters investigated in the sciences"

[14] The term 'epistemic' is usually used with the meaning of "relating to knowledge" (or associated phenomena such as justification and certainty). But it is sometimes used with the meaning of "relating to truth": e.g., when one talks about "epistemic reasons" for or against a belief, one sometimes has in mind considerations that count for or against the belief in virtue of the way they bear on its truth or falsity; and when one says that a given practice has "epistemic value," one sometimes means that it enables one to attain truth and avoid error.

(*PH* I 13, cf. *PH* I 16).[15] Thus, sense (i) of the verb πείθεσθαι is related to the sense of δόγμα that does not imply any assertion about non-evident things, whereas sense (ii) is related to the sense of δόγμα rejected by the Pyrrhonist. We can therefore say that, whereas the Pyrrhonist's assent to what appears persuasive to him is forced and involuntary, the neo-Academic's rests on a voluntary choice; and whereas the Pyrrhonist assents to his πάθη or φαινόμενα, the neo-Academic assents to non-evident things, since he affirms that what he says is persuasive is really so. Hence, the Pyrrhonist may be affected by a given argument in such a way that he is forced to assent to it in the sense of simply yielding to or acquiescing in it, but he is fully aware that this is not enough to justify his assent to it in the sense of affirming that the argument is persuasive, or more persuasive than others, in an objective sense.

PH I 230 makes it clear that there is an ambiguity in the meaning of πιθανόν and that Sextus is skeptical of this notion only when it is used in its strong, epistemic sense. When he says that, unlike the neo-Academics, in everyday life the skeptics do not follow τὸ πιθανόν but laws, customs, and natural affections (*PH* I 231), he is distancing himself from the dogmatic sense of that notion. In the same way must be read Sextus's remark that the skeptics "say that appearances are equal in respect of credibility and lack of credibility, ὅσον ἐπὶ τῷ λόγῳ, whereas [the neo-Academics] say that some are persuasive and others unpersuasive" (*PH* I 227). The expression ὅσον ἐπὶ τῷ λόγῳ could be translated either as "as far as the argument is concerned" or "as far as reason is concerned." On either translation, what Sextus is saying is that, as far the epistemic use of reason is concerned, all appearances appear equally persuasive or credible to the skeptic, since their epistemic status seems to be the same (cf. Brunschwig, 1995: 332–333). By contrast, from a merely psychological point of view, some appearances appear persuasive to him whereas others do not, or some appear more persuasive than others. As we will see in a moment, it is this non-epistemic difference among appearances that enables the skeptic to decide what to do and not to do in everyday life.

To better understand psychological persuasiveness, we need to look at the chapter of the first book of *PH* that deals with the criterion of skepticism. Sextus distinguishes between the criterion of reality and unreality and the criterion of action, and observes that skepticism's practical criterion is what appears (τὸ φαινόμενον). It is by attending to this criterion that in everyday life the skeptic performs some actions and not others (*PH* I 21–22; cf. *PH* II 14, *AD* I 29–30). Sextus then points out that, adhering to what appears, the Pyrrhonist lives in accordance with the observance of everyday life (ἡ βιωτικὴ τήρησις), which consists of four parts: the guidance of nature, the necessitation of affections, the handing down of laws and customs, and the teaching of skills (*PH* I 23; cf. *PH* I 17, 231, 237). Thus, the various ways things appear to the skeptic are shaped by those four factors. When introducing this four-fold observance of everyday life, Sextus makes two key remarks. The first is that the skeptic acts in accordance with it without opinions or non-doxastically (ἀδοξάστως),

[15] For an insightful discussion of the distinction between two types of assent in both Pyrrhonism and Academic skepticism, see Frede (1997). For a detailed analysis of *PH* I 13 and the main interpretations of the Pyrrhonist's δόγματα that have been proposed in the literature, see Fine (2000).

which means that he restricts himself to reporting what appears to him without making any assertion about what things are like in their real nature.[16] The second remark is that the reason the skeptic follows the observance of everyday life is that he cannot be utterly inactive (*PH* I 23; cf. *PH* I 226, *AD* I 30). In other words, the Pyrrhonist acts in accordance with the four aspects of that observance without any doxastic commitment to them, and he does so for a practical reason, since he must guide his actions by some criterion and what appears is the only criterion he is left with after suspending judgment about the epistemic standing of the conflicting views on the various issues he has so far investigated. Now, the Pyrrhonist should not be interpreted as saying that one *should* follow the appearances, for he refrains from making any normative claim. Perhaps the use of the term 'criterion' to refer to the appearances as the Pyrrhonist's guide to action gives the impression that there is some sort of normativity involved. However, we should bear in mind, first, that the Pyrrhonist is indifferent to, or does not fight over, the words he uses to express the way things appear to him (*PH* I 191, 195, 207). Second, given that he wants to make himself understood, he adopts different linguistic practices depending on the context in which he finds himself: in philosophy he falls in with that of the philosophers, in medicine with that of the doctors, and in everyday life with that which is more usual and local (*AM* I 232–233). He also observes the common usage of language because it contributes to the conduct of life (*AM* I 55). The reason for this attitude is probably that from a practical point of view, if one wants to make communication easier (cf. *AM* I 234–235), to avoid pointless and fatiguing explanations, or to succeed in persuading others, on some occasions one must adapt to the terminology and the conceptual categories used by one's interlocutors. This would explain, at least in part, why Sextus occasionally expresses himself in a careless and potentially misleading manner. Consequently, his talk, at *PH* I 21–22, of the Pyrrhonist's criterion of action is to be interpreted in a deflationary sense. The Pyrrhonist finds himself with various kinds of appearances that impose themselves on him, and for this reason he is compelled to assent to those appearances in the sense of acquiescing in them. If this is so, then it is not the case that the Pyrrhonist should accept that he should follow appearances before appearances may become relevant when deciding what to do. In sum, when talking about the criterion of action, Sextus is merely offering a description of the Pyrrhonist's *de facto* guide to action, not making a normative claim.[17]

[16] For the term ἀδοξάστως, see also *PH* I 231, 240, II 102, 246, 254, 258, III 2, 151, 235. For the sense of this term, see Barnes (1990: 2636 n. 113) and Fine (2000: 100 n. 65).

[17] One may hypothesize that the Pyrrhonist's emotions play a key role in his criterion of action: they are part of the non-epistemic factors that influence the way things appear to him and that enable him to decide between alternative courses of action, even though he suspends judgment about which course of action is objectively to be preferred. Even a suspender of judgment may experience gut feelings and bodily reactions in certain situations—as when confronted with an act of rape, murder, or torture—and make decisions on that basis (see McPherran, 1989: 144, 154–156; Machuca, 2019a: 55–56, 2019b: 74–77). In this regard, note that neuroscientist Antonio Damasio (1994) has provided evidence that patients whose emotions were drastically impaired by lesions in a specific part of the brain made either poor decisions or no decisions at all in their daily lives, and

The necessitation of affections is the factor by virtue of which "hunger leads us to food and thirst to drink" (*PH* I 24). Thus, the skeptic can avoid neither feeling hunger or thirst nor having the desire to eat or drink, although he can avoid believing that such feelings are bad by nature (*PH* I 29–30). This is the same factor under whose influence the skeptic grants that he feels hot or cold (*PH* I 13, 29) and that it appears to him that honey sweetens (*PH* I 20), although he suspends judgment about whether fire and ice really are hot and cold, respectively, and about whether honey really is sweet. Similarly, the skeptic cannot help experiencing some things as good and others as bad by virtue of the influence of the laws and customs of his community (*PH* I 24), even though he suspends judgment about whether anything is by nature good or bad (see *PH* III 182, 235; *AD* V 111, 144, 160; also *PH* I 28, 226, III 178; *AD* V 147, 150, 168). The teaching of skills is the factor "whereby we are not inactive in the skills which we acquire" (*PH* I 24), which means that the skeptics have some kind of know-how (Barnes, 1990: 2644–2645). Again, the skeptic cannot prevent things from appearing to him in certain ways by virtue of the education and training he has received, even though he cannot assert that the skills he has acquired enable him to know how things really are. Finally, the guidance of nature is the factor by virtue of which "we are naturally capable of perceiving and thinking" (*PH* I 24). Thus, the skeptic cannot help having sensations and thoughts, even though he suspends judgment about whether their contents correspond to how things really are—and even about whether there is something beyond those perceptions and thoughts.[18] Given that the guidance of nature is one of the factors that shape the way things appear to the skeptic, his appearances are not only perceptual but also intellectual. It seems plain both that among the skeptic's intellectual appearances one must include the various ways arguments phenomenologically strike him and that there is a use of arguments that does not exceed the realm of his appearances (cf. Morrison, 1990: 214). This finds support in two passages. In the first, which is found in the chapter of *PH* that addresses the question whether skeptics belong to a sect, Sextus remarks that they "follow a certain rationale (τινι λόγῳ) in accordance with what appears that shows us a life in conformity with traditional customs, laws, ways of life, and [our] own affections" (*PH* I 17). In the second passage, already quoted in Chap. 2, Sextus is responding to the objection that the Pyrrhonist, because of his suspension of judgment, cannot investigate what the dogmatists talk about:

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hence that reasoning deprived of emotional input is useless when it comes to such decisions. On this, see also Haidt (2013: 39–41, 52–53).

[18] Most scholars maintain that the Pyrrhonist does not call into question the existence of the external world. These include, among others, Burnyeat (1982), de Olaso (1983), Caujolle-Zaslawsky (1986), Williams (1986, 1988, 2010), Frede (1988), Everson (1991), Striker (1996), Hankinson (1998), McDowell (1998), and Grene (1999). I side with those who think that the Pyrrhonist suspends judgment not only about the objective properties of things, but also about their very existence. For this interpretation, see especially Fine (1996: 276–283; 2003) and Machuca (2013b), also Naess (1968: 17–18), Mates (1984: 23; 1992a: 212–213, 225; 1992b: 131–133; 1996: 17–21, 232–233, 238), and Johnsen (2001: 557).

> If they say that they mean that it is not this kind of apprehension but rather thinking *simpliciter* that should precede investigation, then investigation is not impossible for those who suspend judgment about the reality of non-evident things. For the skeptic is not, I suppose, excluded from thinking that both arises from things that passively strike him and arguments that appear evidently to him (ἀπό τε τῶν παθητικῶς ὑποπιπτόντων <καὶ> κατ᾽ ἐνάργειαν φαινόμενων αὐτῷ λόγων), and in no way implies the reality of the things that are thought. […] For this reason, while both investigating and thinking the suspender of judgment remains in the skeptical disposition; for it has been shown that he assents to the things that strike him in accordance with a passive appearance insofar as it appears to him. (*PH* II 10)

I follow Mutschmann and Mau (1958) in retaining λόγων, which is the reading of the main manuscript. While Pellegrin (1997) does the same, Bury (1933) and Mates (1996) prefer to replace it with λόγῳ, and Annas and Barnes (2000) omit the word altogether. I also choose to render λόγων as "arguments." If that is correct, then there are arguments that appear evidently to the skeptic, which means that his intellectual appearances include arguments and that he assents to these arguments simply in the sense that he yields to or acquiesces in them, rather than in the sense that he endorses their conclusions. This idea of arguments that are part of the skeptic's appearances is in line with *PH* I 17, where we are told that the skeptic follows a certain rationale or line of reasoning that is in line with what appears to him.

I will have more to say about the skeptic's use of λόγος in Chap. 5. For now, let me remark that it seems clear that, if his use of reason is to be effective in guiding his actions through the complex affairs of life, it must include both the consideration and the production of arguments. It also seems clear that the arguments that show him a life that fits with the customs and laws of his community or with his own affections, and hence that enable him to make certain practical decisions, must appear persuasive to him. This persuasiveness is psychological rather than epistemic, for the skeptic does not find those arguments persuasive because he thinks that they reveal how things are. In this connection, note that Sextus points out that the skeptic "does not live in accordance with philosophical reasoning (κατὰ τὸν φιλόσοφον λόγον)—for he is inactive as far as this is concerned—but he is able to choose some things and avoid others in accordance with non-philosophical observance (κατὰ τὴν ἀφιλόσοφον τήρησιν)" (*AD* V 165). This passage must not be interpreted as saying that philosophy *tout court* has no influence upon the skeptic's life.[19] Rather, what Sextus calls "philosophical reasoning" is the kind of theoretical reflection that purports to grasp the real nature of things. This sort of reasoning is useless to the Pyrrhonist when it comes to practical decisions simply because, due to the conflicts of equipollent arguments, he is unable to reach a rationally justified conclusion about what he ought to do. For this reason, if such reasoning were the only available criterion for deciding between alternative courses of action, the Pyrrhonist would remain inactive. However, there is also a use of reason that, insofar as it does not go beyond the realm of appearances, enables him to decide what to do in certain circumstances. This practical use of reason forms part, as we saw, of

[19] In several passages, Sextus refers to Pyrrhonism as a philosophy or to the Pyrrhonist as a philosopher: see, e.g., *PH* I 4, 5, 11, 236, II 6, 9; *AD* I 30, II 191.

the everyday observance, which is to be identified with the non-philosophical observance mentioned at *AD* V 165. In short, I think that certain arguments strike the Pyrrhonist as persuasive under the influence of factors such as his psychological makeup, his current emotional states, his upbringing, his education and professional training, his philosophical background, and the social and cultural context in which he happens to live, even though from an epistemic point of view he finds those arguments as persuasive as those that conflict with them.

How is all this compatible with the skeptic's suspension of judgment? In the explanation of the skeptical phrase "To every argument an equal argument is opposed," we are told that the word λόγος refers to the argument that "establishes something dogmatically, i.e., about the non-evident" (*PH* I 202, see also 203–204). By remarking that conflicting arguments appear equally persuasive to the skeptic to the extent that they involve assertions about non-evident things, Sextus is here implicitly saying that those arguments may differ in their persuasiveness as far as, as it were, the psychological effect they have on him is concerned. Note also that, when explaining the skeptical notion of non-assertion (ἀφασία), he points out that "we say that we neither posit nor reject none of the things that are said dogmatically concerning the non-evident; for we yield to the things that passively move us and lead us necessarily to assent" (*PH* I 193; cf. *PH* I 197–198, 200–202). We saw earlier that the things that appear are those that lead us involuntarily to assent (*PH* I 19). Given that at *PH* I 19 Sextus talks about the appearances in general and that among the skeptic's appearances are those shaped by the four aspects of the observance of everyday life, these various kinds of appearances, including the arguments that appear evidently to the skeptic, do not fall within the scope of non-assertion or any other skeptical phrase. The reason is that these phrases are not used "about all objects universally, but about those that are non-evident and investigated dogmatically" (*PH* I 208). The skeptical phrases give expression to the skeptic's refusal to assent—in the strong, dogmatic sense of this notion—to any non-evident thing; they are not, and cannot be, employed to talk about what appears (cf. Brunschwig, 1997: 314). This is why Sextus remarks that skeptics do not investigate what appears (*PH* I 19–20) and that the appearance is not a matter of investigation (*PH* I 22; cf. DL IX 77). Rather, what is investigated is what is said about what appears or whether the underlying object is such as it appears (*PH* I 19–20, 22): the skeptic's investigation consists in trying to determine whether it is possible to make assertions about what things are like in their real nature.

There is a passage in which Sextus seems to explicitly refer to the psychological persuasiveness of an argument. At the end of the second book of *Against the Dogmatists*, he tells us that, in reply to the dogmatic objection that the skeptical arguments against demonstration are self-refuting, the skeptics

> [473] will say that the argument against demonstration is only persuasive and that at present it persuades them and induces assent (πιθανὸν εἶναι μόνον καὶ πρὸς τὸ παρὸν πείθειν αὐτοὺς καὶ ἐπάγεσθαι συγκατάθεσιν), but that they do not know whether it will also be so in the future due to the variability of human thought. When the answer is of this kind, the dogmatist will not be able to say anything further. For either he will teach that the argument brought against demonstration is not true, or he will establish this: that it does not persuade

> the skeptic. [474] But if he shows the first, he is not in conflict with the skeptic, since the latter does not assert that that argument is true, but only says that it is persuasive. [475] And if he does the second, he will be rash, wishing to overthrow another person's affection by argument. For just as no one can, by means of argument, persuade the person who is glad that he is not glad and the person who is in pain that he is not in pain, so neither can one persuade the person who is persuaded that he is not persuaded. [476] In addition, if the skeptics strongly affirmed, with assent, that demonstration is nothing, perhaps they would be dissuaded by the person who teaches that demonstration exists. But as it is, since they make a bare statement of the arguments against demonstration without assenting to them, they are so far from being harmed by those who establish the opposite that, rather, they are helped. [477] For if the arguments introduced against demonstration have remained unrefuted, and the arguments adopted in favor of there being demonstration are in their turn strong, let us agree to suspend judgment, subscribing neither to the former nor to the latter. (*AD* II 473–477)

On the face of it, the first part of this passage (*AD* II 473–475) poses a serious problem for the consistency of Pyrrhonism. For whereas in several other passages Sextus presents the Pyrrhonist's suspension of judgment about whether *p* as the result of the equal persuasiveness of the conflicting arguments bearing on whether *p*, in the present passage he tells us that the Pyrrhonist is persuaded by a given argument—the one against there being demonstration. Although he might not be persuaded by that argument *in the future*, he is *now* persuaded, and hence we have the right to ask: on what grounds does the Pyrrhonist *at present* suspend judgment about whether there is demonstration? In other words, what are the opposing arguments that *at present* strike him as equipollent?[20] It might be suggested that one of the arguments is the argument against demonstration, while the other is an argument that appeals to the variability of human thought to show that one should not doxastically assent to an argument that at present strikes one as persuasive. Although I think that a suggestion along these lines might enable the Pyrrhonist to explain how the use of the argument from possible disagreement is not at variance with his skeptical stance,[21] one need not appeal to it in the present context. For, as the second part of the passage makes clear (*AD* II 476–477), the Pyrrhonist's suspension about whether there is demonstration is the result of the equal persuasiveness of the arguments pro and con there being demonstration. By my lights, the kind of argumentative persuasiveness mentioned in the first part of the passage is psychological rather than epistemic, for Sextus says that, if the dogmatist intended to establish that the argument against demonstration does not persuade the skeptic, he would be trying "to overthrow another person's affection by argument" (*AD* II 475). Because being psychologically persuaded is a πάθος, it is not possible, by means of argument, to persuade someone that he is not persuaded, just as it is not possible to persuade the person who is glad or in pain that he is not in such states (cf. *AD* V 148–149, DL IX 108). The reference, at *AD* II 473, to the variability of human thought must be interpreted

[20] In his analysis of the passage, Svavarsson (2014: 360–362) fails to realize that, in order for suspension to be induced, the opposing arguments must presently strike the skeptic as equally persuasive. On this, see Machuca (2017).

[21] I will examine the argument from possible disagreement in the next chapter.

in the sense that the psychological factors that influence one's affections vary with time, so that what psychologically persuades us now may not psychologically persuade us later (cf. *AD* II 51–54, DL IX 94). If this is correct, then the assent that, according to *AD* II 473, is induced by the argument against demonstration is non-doxastic and is therefore distinct from the kind of assent mentioned at *AD* II 476, which results from the belief that the argument against demonstration is true. The fact that conflicting arguments appear equally persuasive to the skeptic in an epistemic sense, thereby inducing him to withhold his doxastic assent, does not prevent some arguments from appearing persuasive to him in a psychological sense, and hence does not prevent him from non-doxastically assenting to them. Thus, the skeptic non-doxastically assents to the argument against demonstration in the sense that he acknowledges that, as a matter of psychological fact, he is presently affected in a certain way: that argument presently appears persuasive to him—but only in a non-epistemic sense.

Let me consider three objections to my interpretation of the passage. First, it might be claimed that *AD* II 473 can be read as implicitly saying that the argument against demonstration at present persuades the skeptic with the same strength as the arguments in favor of demonstration, previously presented, persuade him. By remarking that he cannot exclude the possibility that, in the future, he will no longer find the argument against demonstration persuasive, Sextus is recognizing that, if that happened and if he still found the arguments in favor of demonstration persuasive, he would no longer withhold assent. If Sextus were saying that, at present, the skeptic is persuaded only by the argument against demonstration and so assents to its conclusion, he would be breaching suspension of judgment. In response, it should be noted, first, that this way of interpreting the reply to the self-refutation objection given at *AD* II 473 makes it in the end equivalent to the reply given at *AD* II 476–477, which Sextus introduces as an *additional* reply (πρὸς τούτοις). Second, there is no breach of suspension if one takes the kind of persuasiveness at issue as merely psychological and the related kind of assent as non-doxastic.

The second objection is that, in talking about epistemic persuasiveness, I overlook the fact that suspension is the state of being psychologically unable to choose between conflicting arguments that purport to account for how things really are, and that I should therefore talk instead of two kinds of psychological persuasiveness (Tor, 2014: 97–98). Now, when I said that the fact that Sextus says that his being persuaded by the argument against demonstration is an affection indicates that the kind of persuasiveness in question is psychological, I might have given the impression that, when it comes to the suspension that results from the apparent equipollence of conflicting arguments, it is not a matter of how the Pyrrhonist is affected. However, it is clear that, when he says that he finds conflicting arguments equipollent, he is reporting on how he is affected by them. At *PH* I 7, Sextus explicitly says that suspension is an affection.[22] Just as it is not possible, by means of argument, to persuade the Pyrrhonist who is psychologically persuaded by an argument that he is

[22] I will have more to say about suspension as a πάθος in Chap. 5.6.

not so persuaded, so too is it not possible, by means of argument, to persuade the Pyrrhonist who suspends judgment that it is not the case that his "intellect is suspended so as neither to accept nor to reject anything" (*PH* I 196). There is, however, a crucial difference between the two affections. While the affection of being persuaded by the argument against demonstration is not the result of an assessment of its epistemic strength, the affection of suspension is the result of an assessment of the epistemic strength of the arguments for and against there being demonstration. When a Pyrrhonist, who is a suspender of judgment, says that he is persuaded by an argument and that his being so persuaded is an affection, this can only be interpreted in the sense that the argument has a certain psychological influence on him despite the fact that it does not strike him as epistemically stronger than rival arguments. For if it struck him as epistemically stronger than rival arguments, he would of course be affected in a certain way, but this affection would not be suspension and he would thereby cease to be a Pyrrhonist.

The third objection is that the Pyrrhonist cannot be persuaded by an argument without failing to be in a suspensive state of mind, since to be persuaded of *p* by an argument A is to come to believe that *p* is true or likely to be true on the basis of the reasons provided by the premises of A. The Pyrrhonist may perhaps "acquiesce in" what is stated in the conclusion, but not because he is persuaded by the argument. For example, he may still be moved by the claim, expressed in the conclusion of an argument, that abortion is wrong, but if he is persuaded by the argument in question, he cannot but find the claim true or likely to be true. The proponent of this objection thus accepts only what I have described as the epistemic kind of argumentative persuasiveness. To my mind, however, it seems possible that consideration of an argument may exert a certain influence on someone who suspends judgment about whether it is sound or even on someone who denies that it is sound. For a person might find an argument persuasive, in the sense that it has a certain psychological influence on him as he is going through it, even though he is well aware that it is a sophism or that equally strong counterarguments have been put forward, and so even though he refrains from doxastically assenting to it. Probably many would prefer not to use in this case terms like 'persuasive' and 'persuade', but since Sextus does use the Greek equivalent with two different senses, I fall in with his usage. In addition, in a number of modern languages those terms are sometimes used in such a way as to contrast them with 'convincing' and 'convince': whereas 'persuasive' and 'persuade' have an emotional and rhetorical connotation (one may persuade someone that *p* by means of a weak argument that appeals to, or even manipulates, his emotions), 'convincing' and 'convince' have a logical or rational connotation (one convinces someone that *p* by means of an argument because the argument appeals to evidence that establishes the truth of *p*). One can imagine someone saying, with perfect sense, "Persuasive argument, but I'm not convinced!"

Let us take stock. When in his philosophical inquiries the Pyrrhonist examines the conflicting arguments bearing on a given topic, he assesses the truth of the premises and conclusion and the validity of the logical form of each of the arguments with the aim of determining whether any of them reveals how things really are. The result of such an examination is a *de facto* suspension: the Pyrrhonist as a matter of

fact finds himself unable to determine whether any of the arguments he has so far considered is to be preferred because they all strike him as equally persuasive in an epistemic sense. However, after suspending judgment, the Pyrrhonist may be somehow influenced by one of the conflicting arguments and, hence, be persuaded by it: one of them may in fact exert some kind of psychological influence on him on account of certain factors that do not confer a higher epistemic status on the argument in question. This kind of persuasiveness is not epistemic because it is not a persuasiveness on the basis of which he can make an assertion about how things really are.

Given the distinction between epistemic and psychological persuasiveness, what kind of persuasiveness is that which is at issue in the closing chapter of *PH*? Is it epistemic, psychological, or of some other kind? By my lights, it is epistemic. For in order for an argument to be therapeutically effective, i.e., to succeed in persuading a given dogmatic patient, it must be deemed to be epistemically persuasive by him. More precisely, the therapeutic argument must strike the patient as being as epistemically persuasive as the opposite argument he himself puts forward, since it is this state of equipollence that will lead him to suspend judgment. This does not mean, however, that the distinction between weighty and weak arguments at *PH* III 280–281 is a distinction between arguments that differ in their epistemic persuasiveness, for the Pyrrhonian doctor does not regard some arguments as being more epistemically persuasive than others. Rather, a therapeutic argument is regarded by him as weighty or weak in its persuasiveness depending on whether the patient persuaded by the argument is highly or mildly conceited, respectively: a weighty therapeutic argument is one that strikes a highly conceited patient as being as epistemically persuasive as the opposite argument he advances, whereas a weak therapeutic argument is one that strikes a mildly conceited patient as being so. The persuasiveness in question is epistemic, and this epistemic persuasiveness may have strong or weak therapeutic effects, so that the distinction between two types of arguments is not epistemic, but therapeutic: some arguments are therapeutically weighty in their persuasiveness and others therapeutically mild. Although it is the dogmatist who may be persuaded by a therapeutic argument propounded by the skeptic, it is the latter who characterizes that argument as weighty or weak in its persuasiveness according to whether the dogmatist persuaded by it was afflicted by a high or low degree of conceit and rashness.

In sum, epistemically, conflicting arguments appear equally persuasive to the Pyrrhonist; psychologically, some arguments may appear persuasive to him and others unpersuasive, or some more persuasive than others; therapeutically, some arguments appear weighty to him and others appear weak in their persuasiveness. This last case does not concern a third kind of persuasiveness because the skeptical psychotherapist is reporting on how he is appeared to in relation to the distinct therapeutic effects that the epistemic persuasiveness of various arguments has on his dogmatic patients. The focus is not on how persuasive, epistemically or psychologically, an argument strikes the Pyrrhonist, but on how therapeutically effective the epistemic persuasiveness of an argument appears to him to be.

3.5 Conclusion

In addition to an oppositional use of arguments, the Pyrrhonist makes a therapeutic, a dialectical, and an investigative use of them. The dialectical use is clearly related to the therapeutic use inasmuch as, in his argumentative therapy, the Pyrrhonist employs arguments to which he is not himself committed but that his dogmatic patients must regard as being as epistemically persuasive as the rival arguments they put forward. The dialectical use of arguments is also related to the investigative use of them inasmuch as, to test the epistemic credentials of the views he open-mindedly examines in his debate with the dogmatists, the Pyrrhonist avails himself of arguments he does not accept *in propria persona*. It is more difficult to find a connection between the therapeutic and the investigative uses of arguments. They are two uses that have different motivations. Because of his philanthropic attitude, the Pyrrhonist is concerned about the intellectual well-being of his dogmatic rivals, and because of his suspensive attitude and his inquisitive temperament or personality, he continues his open-minded inquiry into truth. However, the fact that the therapeutic and the investigative uses of arguments are independent activities with different motivations does not mean that they are incompatible. Moreover, the Pyrrhonist's interest in inquiry into truth could in principle be a reason to make a therapeutic use of arguments: if truth-oriented inquiry is a collective or cooperative endeavor, then the dogmatists' conceit and rashness may constitute an obstacle to the potential success of that activity.

The Pyrrhonian doctor distinguishes between weighty and weak arguments. The distinction is not one between valid or sound and invalid or unsound arguments. Neither is the distinction based on the number of patients an argument can cure or the number of beliefs targeted by an argument, but rather on the degree of conceit and rashness that afflicts the patient who is cured by the argument. Lastly, the distinction is not at variance with the equipollence of conflicting arguments that leads to suspension because it is not based on the extent to which the weighty or mild arguments capture the nature of things, but on their *de facto* ability to persuade highly or mildly conceited dogmatists. The persuasiveness referred to in the taxonomy of therapeutic arguments is nonetheless epistemic because weighty therapeutic arguments are those which appear to the highly conceited patients to be as epistemically persuasive as the arguments they themselves put forward, whereas weak therapeutic arguments are those that appear to be so to the mildly conceited patients. Now, even though the Pyrrhonist suspends judgment about the validity or soundness of arguments, some arguments may in fact strike the Pyrrhonist himself as more persuasive than others, but only in a merely psychological sense. We can thus say that the skeptic is equally persuaded in an epistemic sense by the opposing arguments bearing on whether p that he has so far considered in his inquiry into whether p, while at the same time he may be persuaded in a deflationary, psychological sense by only one of those arguments.

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Chapter 4
The Agrippan Modes and the Challenge of Disagreement

Abstract This chapter is devoted to the Five Modes of Agrippa, with a special focus on the mode from disagreement. It is argued (i) that the mode from disagreement does not play a secondary role in inducing suspension of judgment; (ii) that the Pyrrhonist is not committed to the requirements on justification underlying the Agrippan modes, which nonetheless does not prevent him from assenting to them in a non-doxastic way; (iii) that certain objections to Agrippan Pyrrhonism fail to appreciate the Pyrrhonist's dialectical style of argumentation and the challenge posed by the mode from disagreement; and (iv) that the argument from possible disagreement can be interpreted in a way that makes it compatible with Sextus's account of Pyrrhonism.

Keywords *Ad hominem* argument · Agrippa's trilemma · Assertion · Dialectical conception of justification · Mode from disagreement · Non-doxastic assent · Questionable assumptions

4.1 Introduction

The so-called Five Modes of Agrippa are the most powerful weapons of the Pyrrhonian argumentative arsenal. This chapter examines the way those modes are supposed to induce suspension and the Pyrrhonist's stance on them. It is argued (i) that the mode from disagreement does not play a secondary role in inducing suspension of judgment; (ii) that the Pyrrhonist is not committed to the requirements on justification underlying the Agrippan modes, which nonetheless does not prevent him from assenting to them in a weak, non-doxastic way; (iii) that certain objections to Agrippan Pyrrhonism fail to appreciate the Pyrrhonist's dialectical style of argumentation and the challenge posed by the mode from disagreement; and (iv) that what I call "the argument from possible disagreement" can be interpreted in a way that makes it compatible with Sextus's account of Pyrrhonism.

In Sect. 4.2, I analyze the way in which the Agrippan modes are supposed to induce suspension and the relations among them. I defend the view that the mode from disagreement by itself poses a serious challenge to the epistemic credentials of

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our beliefs. Then, in Sect. 4.3, I examine the Pyrrhonist's *ad hominem* use of the Five Modes and the sense in which he may be said to assent to them. In Sect. 4.4, I argue that those contemporary philosophers who seek to neutralize the Agrippan modes by identifying its alleged problematic assumptions misinterpret the Pyrrhonist's use of these modes and underestimate the challenge posed by disagreement. In Sect. 4.5, I look at the passages in which Sextus lays out the argument from possible disagreement—which is a special version of the mode from disagreement—and consider whether this argument is at variance with the definition of skepticism and with the open-minded character of skeptical investigation. In Sect. 4.6, I offer some concluding remarks.

4.2 The Five Modes

In the first book of *Pyrrhonian Outlines*, Sextus expounds three sets of modes by means of which suspension of judgment is supposed to be induced: the Ten Modes (*PH* I 35–163), the Five Modes (*PH* I 164–177), and the Two Modes (*PH* I 178–179). The Five Modes are attributed to Agrippa by Diogenes Laertius (DL IX 88) and constitute the most lethal weapons of the skeptical armory due to their apparent intuitiveness and universal scope. They are disagreement, infinite regress, relativity, hypothesis, and reciprocity. Sextus expounds them as follows:

> The mode deriving from disagreement is that by means of which we discover that, with regard to the matter proposed, there has arisen, both in ordinary life and among philosophers, an undecidable dispute (ἀνεπίκριτον στάσιν) owing to which we end up with suspension of judgment, since we are not able to choose or to reject anything. The mode deriving from regress *ad infinitum* is that in which we say that what is offered as a warrant (πίστιν) for the matter proposed needs another warrant, and this latter needs another, and so on *ad infinitum*, so that, given that we have nowhere from which to begin to establish it, suspension of judgment follows. The mode deriving from relativity, as we said before, is that in which the underlying object appears thus and so relative to what does the judging and to the things observed together with it, but we suspend judgment about what it is like in relation to nature. The mode deriving from hypothesis is that which arises whenever the dogmatists, being thrown back *ad infinitum*, begin from something that they do not establish but that they deem worthy to assume simply and without proof by virtue of a concession. The reciprocal mode arises whenever that which ought to be confirmatory of the matter investigated needs a warrant from what is investigated. In this case, as we are not able to take either to establish the other, we suspend judgment about both. (*PH* I 165–169; cf. DL IX 88–89.)

Let me begin by observing that the modes of hypothesis, reciprocity, and infinite regress constitute what in contemporary philosophy is known as "Agrippa's trilemma."[1] Much of recent epistemology is devoted to responding to the trilemma—mainly under the label "the epistemic regress problem" or "the problem

[1] To the best of my knowledge, the first to have used the expression "Agrippa's trilemma" is Williams (1988: 570).

of the regress of justification"—even though few authors are familiar with the way in which it was used by the ancient Pyrrhonists. Each of the three modes targets a specific justificatory strategy: in contemporary parlance, the mode of hypothesis targets the foundationalist's view that some beliefs are basic or self-justifying; the mode of reciprocity targets the coherentist's view that a belief is justified provided it is part of a system of mutually supporting beliefs;[2] and the mode of infinite regress targets the infinitist's view that a belief is justified provided it is supported by an infinite chain of non-repeating reasons. Now, even though Sextus says or implies that each of the three modes in question can induce suspension separately,[3] the immediately following passage (*PH* I 170–177)—in which he explains the manner in which the Agrippan modes bring about suspension regarding every object of investigation—makes it clear that suspension can be induced more effectively when they work in tandem. This is reasonable because, although one can imagine that someone adopting one of the above strategies may suspend judgment after being confronted with the corresponding mode, he will more probably appeal to the other strategies to find an alternative way to justify his beliefs. When used together, the three modes under consideration weave the web that will trap those who endeavor to defend the epistemic credentials of their beliefs (cf. Barnes, 1990: 113–120).

As regards the mode from disagreement, it is plain that the mere existence of a disagreement does not justify suspending judgment, because one may come to the conclusion that one of the conflicting views is to be preferred to the others. This is why, when he presents the mode from disagreement at *PH* I 165, Sextus speaks of "undecidable" or "unresolvable" dispute: it is the fact that we have so far been unable to resolve the dispute about whether *p* that leads us to suspend judgment about whether *p*.[4] Now, it appears that the skeptic's inability to resolve a dispute is the result of the use of the Agrippan trilemma to show that any attempt to rationally justify one of conflicting views fails. As the explanation at *PH* I 170–177 seems to indicate and as interpreters usually point out, the mode from disagreement presents the material on which the trilemma works. Someone might then argue that the disagreement mode is actually a two-step strategy: (i) presentation of a dispute and (ii) application of the trilemma to show that the dispute cannot be settled. When applied to a disagreement, the modes of hypothesis, reciprocity, and infinite regress work in

[2] Sextus's mode of reciprocity deals exclusively with pairs of mutually supporting arguments, but it could well work against other types of circular argument (see Barnes, 1990: 60–61, 64–65).

[3] Note that, when presenting each of the Five Modes except the mode of hypothesis, Sextus explicitly says that it induces suspension. This is merely an oversight, for I see no reason to legitimately claim that, whereas the mode of infinite regress or the mode of reciprocity can induce suspension, the mode of hypothesis cannot.

[4] Even though for the Pyrrhonist an ἀνεπίρκιτος διαφωνία or στάσις is not a disagreement that is unresolvable or undecidable in itself or once and for all, I prefer to translate ἀνεπίρκιτος as 'unresolvable' or 'undecidable' rather than as 'unresolved' or 'undecided' (cf. Barnes, 1990: 18–19). The reason is that, if the conflicting views on whether *p* appear equipollent to someone, he may say that it is not *possible* for him to prefer any one of them to the others. In this regard, note that at *PH* I 165 Sextus remarks that the reason we end up suspending judgment when confronted with an ἀνεπίρκιτος στάσις is that "we are not able (οὐ δυνάμενοι) to choose or to reject anything."

combination with one another: when someone attempts to escape from one of them in his endeavor to justify his view on the disputed matter, he falls into one of the other two. The trilemma shows that the conflicting views fare equally badly as far as their justificatory standing is concerned. Since all the disagreeing parties get caught in the trap set by those modes, one must suspend judgment about which of the conflicting views, if any, is correct.[5] In sum, the mode from disagreement could be interpreted as a complex argumentative strategy at the core of which is the Agrippan trilemma.[6]

As noted above, the trilemma can in principle induce suspension even in the absence of a disagreement. For even if there is no dispute about a given claim, one may ask how that claim is justified and then attack, by means of the trilemma, the different strategies purporting to provide us with the required justification. Given that one is unable to justify the claim, one must suspend judgment about whether it is true or false. This is the reason why Jonathan Barnes contends that disagreement

> is not an epistemologically necessary condition for the generation of scepticism. Rather, it should be thought of as a psychologically useful aid to the sceptic. If there is no disagreement at all on some issue, then you might well – if erroneously – imagine that there was no room or reason for doubt, that you were justified in assenting to the opinion insofar as there was no dissentient voice. Hence the observation of disagreement is pertinent to Pyrrhonism: it draws attention to the fact that assent should not be given without ado – doubt *might* be raised because doubts *have* been raised. (Barnes, 1990: 116)

It could be argued that claiming that Agrippa's trilemma can by itself bring about suspension is problematic because, in the absence of actual disagreements, the Pyrrhonist loses one of the necessary conditions for his skeptical stance. This view is supported by at least two passages. First, as we saw in Chap. 2, at *PH* I 8 Sextus defines skepticism as "an ability to set up oppositions among things that appear and things that are thought in any way whatsoever, an ability from which we come, because of the equipollence in the opposed objects and arguments, first to suspension of judgment and after that to undisturbedness." Second, at *PH* I 31 he points out that, "speaking rather generally, one could say that [suspension of judgment] arises through the opposition of things." Producing oppositions then seems to be essential to inducing suspension of judgment. Insofar as the parties to a disagreement are opposing—in fact, several of the oppositions laid out in, e.g., the Ten Modes are disagreements—one may argue that, if one sets aside the mode from disagreement, one is distorting the nature of skepticism. Note, however, that at *PH* I 165–169 Sextus says or implies that each of the modes can induce suspension on its own. But even if he had not said or implied that, there is no reason why the conception of skepticism expressed at *PH* I 8 and 31 should prevent one from discovering new

[5] As we will see in Sect. 4.3, the word 'must' in this sentence is to be interpreted psychologically or normatively depending on whether the Pyrrhonist is talking *in propria persona* or arguing against his dogmatic rivals, respectively. The question of whether suspension is to be understood as resulting from a merely psychological constraint or rather from a commitment to a rational requirement will be addressed at length in Chap. 5.6.

[6] As will become clear below, I do not endorse this interpretation of the disagreement mode.

applications of the Agrippan modes. Moreover, by using only the modes of infinite regress, reciprocity, and hypothesis to induce suspension, one strengthens the Pyrrhonist's argumentative strategy by offering one possible rebuttal of the objection that, given that disagreements are not pervasive and given that inducing suspension rests on the actual existence of disagreements, then this state of mind can at most be induced in a limited number of cases.[7]

Even though I agree with Barnes that Agrippa's trilemma can in principle induce suspension independently of the existence of a dispute because one may always ask why one holds a given belief, I do not think that disagreement should be considered merely a psychological aid or reminder, and for three reasons. The first is that for some epistemologists one is under no obligation to give reasons for one's belief that *p* in the absence of a concrete challenge to its epistemic credentials. The existence of a disagreement can be taken to constitute such a challenge. For example, if two persons who take themselves to be roughly cognitive equals with respect to whether *p* discover that they disagree about whether *p*, they can take this disagreement as higher-order evidence that they might have made a mistake when assessing the first-order evidence bearing on whether *p*. Only once such a disagreement arises can the Agrippan trilemma be applied to show that, in the end, neither disputant can justify his belief about whether *p*, and hence that their beliefs are epistemically on a par.

My second reason for rejecting Barnes's view is that the mode from disagreement can lead to suspension without the application of the trilemma. Faced with the disagreement about whether *p*, a person may assess the arguments for and against *p* and find them equally strong, thereby suspending judgment about whether *p*, without realizing that both the attempt to justify belief in *p* and the attempt to justify belief in not-*p* lead to the epistemic regress problem. In several passages in which he does not appeal to the trilemma, Sextus says that the Pyrrhonist is compelled to suspend judgment in the face of an unresolvable disagreement. For example, in concluding his exposition of the Tenth Mode, which deals with disagreements about moral and religious matters, Sextus points out that, given that we are not able to say what each object is like in its nature but only how it appears in relation to various factors, we must suspend judgment about what things are really like (*PH* I 145–163). In addition, a disagreement may be deemed unresolvable when there is both evidential and cognitive equality between the disputants. In fact, as we will see in Chap. 6, the burgeoning area of inquiry known as "the epistemology of disagreement" is centered on the following question: what is the rational response to a dispute between epistemic peers? One of the two main views adopted in the literature is conciliationism, according to which, when confronted with a peer disagreement,

[7] The use of the trilemma could also be interpreted in light of the practice of producing oppositions. That is, when confronted with the dogmatists' epistemological arguments that seek to validate the existence of a criterion of truth or the existence of proof, the Pyrrhonist avails himself of epistemological arguments that seek to establish the impossibility of knowledge and justification. If the opposed epistemological arguments strike him as equipollent, he will suspend judgment (see Williams, 1988: 578–582). Although this reading does not seem to have textual support, it is perfectly compatible with the Pyrrhonian argumentative practice.

one should significantly revise one's belief. On a coarse-grained approach to doxastic attitudes, this view claims that, in the face of such a disagreement, the disputants should suspend judgment. Setting aside the differences between conciliationism and Pyrrhonism,[8] the important point for present purposes is that the former shows that it is in principle possible to suspend judgment in the face of a disagreement even without applying Agrippa's trilemma. In fact, in their analysis of peer disagreement, conciliationists make no reference to the trilemma.[9]

The final reason for not considering the disagreement mode a mere psychological aid is that, as we will see in Sect. 4.4, when dealing with general epistemological theories that offer different solutions to Agrippa's trilemma, the Pyrrhonist cannot make use of the trilemma to counter those theories without begging the question. However, he can still appeal to the mode from disagreement to lay emphasis on the long-standing and deep-rooted debates between the advocates of the distinct epistemological theories, and he can press them to explain how those debates are supposed to be settled in a non-arbitrary way. If they cannot offer such an explanation, then suspension seems called for.[10]

What about the mode from relativity? As interpreters usually remark, its connection with the other four modes is far from clear—so much so that Barnes (1990) does not devote a chapter to it. When Sextus explains, in the chapter on the Five Modes, how they bring about suspension regarding every object of investigation (*PH* I 170–177), he only tells us how the other four modes work together (cf. *PH* II 19–20, 85). However, in the chapter on Aenesidemus's Eight Modes against causal explanations (*PH* I 180–186), he succinctly shows how all Five Modes are connected. At *PH* I 185–186, he remarks that any causal explanation is either disagreed upon or not, but the latter cannot be the case because both apparent and non-evident things are subject to dispute. If so, then one will ask the person offering the explanation for an explanation of the explanation. If he takes an apparent thing as the explanation of an apparent explanation or a non-evident thing as the explanation of a non-evident thing, he will be thrown back *ad infinitum*, whereas if he combines the two sorts of explanation, he will fall into the reciprocal mode. Sextus then adds: "If

[8] There are at least three differences. The first is that the notion of epistemic peer is foreign to Pyrrhonism: the Pyrrhonist does not take himself to have a criterion for identifying epistemic peerhood or epistemic superiority and inferiority. This does not mean, of course, that he would have qualms about using the notion of epistemic peer as grist for his mill, particularly when dealing with recent objections to Agrippan Pyrrhonism (see Sect. 4.4 below). The second difference is that, unlike the conciliationist, the Pyrrhonist does not assert that one is rationally required to suspend judgment when confronted with conflicting views of equal strength. Rather, as we will see in the next chapter, he conceives of suspension as a psychological response that is forced on him. The third difference is that the Pyrrhonist regards undecidable disputes as pervasive, whereas the conciliationist thinks that unresolvable peer disagreements are not the norm.

[9] For other considerations in favor of the view that the mode from disagreement can lead to suspension independently of the trilemma, see Bueno (2013: 37–43).

[10] If the mode from disagreement can induce suspension independently of the Agrippan trilemma, then it cannot be interpreted as a two-step strategy consisting in the presentation of a dispute and the application of the trilemma to show that the dispute cannot be settled.

he takes a stand somewhere, either he will say that the explanation holds as far as the things that have been said go and will introduce relativity[11] (ὅσον ἐπὶ τοῖς εἰρημένοις λέξει τὴν αἰτίαν συνεστάναι, καὶ εἰσάγει τὸ πρὸς τι), thus abolishing what is in relation to nature, or, assuming something by hypothesis, he will be led to suspend judgement" (*PH* I 186). The difference between the two alternatives is that, whereas by assuming an explanation by hypothesis one accepts the explanation without reference to anything else, by accepting an explanation in light of what has already been said one admits that the explanation can be accepted only in relation to something else. The problem with the latter alternative is, I think, that one's dissenter may also take a stand and claim that his rival explanation is to be accepted in light of what he has already said, thereby making it clear that his own explanation, too, can be accepted only in relation to something else. How could we then non-arbitrarily privilege one explanation over the other as being correct insofar as both are acceptable only in relation to a given framework? Thus, the mode from relativity, just as those that make up the trilemma, can be applied to a disagreement to show that it cannot be resolved and, hence, that we must suspend judgment. It might be argued that the use of the relativity mode against the first alternative is awkward inasmuch as the last explanation that the dogmatist accepts both explains the previous explanations and is explained by them. If so, should Sextus not use the reciprocal mode instead? No, because the dogmatist is not saying that the last explanation is explained by the previous ones, but rather that, taking into consideration the chain of explanatory links he has laid out up to this point, that last explanation is all he needs to close the chain.

In light of the foregoing remarks and the general description of the relativity mode at *PH* I 167, I think we can say the following: given that the disputants' conflicting judgments about *x* are to be explained by the conflicting ways in which *x* appears both relative to each disputant and relative to the circumstances in which *x* is observed, we are in fact unable to determine what *x* is like by nature, i.e., independently of the factors that shape the various ways in which *x* appears. For how could we prefer an appearance that is molded by certain factors to a conflicting appearance that is molded by other factors? If by using a criterion, we are faced with the problem that there is disagreement about what the correct criterion is and the disputants' conflicting judgments about this matter are to be explained by the conflicting ways in which the matter appears in relation to various factors. We are therefore unable to determine what the correct criterion is independently of the factors that shape the distinct conceptions of it. As a result, each of the conflicting judgments about *x* is acceptable only in relation to a given criterion, whose acceptance itself is relative. The relativity mode is designed to show that we cannot say what anything is like purely (εἰλικρινῶς) but only in relation to something else (cf. *PH* I 124, 127, 140, 207), because we cannot but perceive or grasp things in certain relations. If so, then we must suspend about how things really are.

[11] τὸ πρὸς τι: literally, "the in relation to something."

4.3 *Ad Hominem* Argumentation and Non-doxastic Assent

A question that naturally arises is whether the Pyrrhonist employs the Agrippan modes to establish that no belief is ever epistemically justified. If that were his intention, then he would be trying to convince us that it is impossible to know how things really are—which is, as we saw in Chap. 2, the view that Sextus ascribes to certain Academics.[12] We find here one of the two problems faced by Sextus's description of the Pyrrhonist as an open-minded inquirer into truth that were not addressed in the preceding two chapters: such a description is at variance with the fact that the Agrippan modes seem designed to show that the search for truth is doomed to failure. There are, however, at least three reasons to deny that the Pyrrhonist employs the Modes of Agrippa to establish that no belief is ever epistemically justified, and hence that we must suspend judgment about how things are once and for all.

The first reason is that one should interpret everything Sextus says about the Five Modes as mere reports of the way things appear to him. At the very beginning of *PH*, he remarks: "we will give an outline of the skeptical approach, with the caveat that we assert of none of the things to be discussed that they certainly are just as we say they are, but rather we report descriptively on each thing according to how it appears to us now" (*PH* I 4; cf. *PH* I 135, 198, 200; *AD* V 18–20). The appearances in question are non-epistemic, since reporting on how things appear is contrasted with asserting how they are. Applied to the modes, I take this general caveat to mean that the Pyrrhonist refrains from asserting that they are sound arguments.

The second reason concerns the Agrippan trilemma: in attacking the foundationalist, the coherentist, and the infinitist theories of justification, the Pyrrhonist is relying on the dogmatists' own views. In other words, the modes of hypothesis, reciprocity, and infinite regress are *ad hominem* arguments, since they are parasitic on the dogmatists' own requirements on justification.[13] There are ancient texts by certain dogmatists that explicitly condemn both infinitely regressive arguments and reciprocal arguments.[14] And from Sextus we also know that some dogmatists condemned putting forward a claim as a bare assertion (*AD* II 360, 463–464). Thus, the Pyrrhonian strategy consists in arguing that, if one endorses the dogmatists' own requirements on justification, one must conclude that no belief is ever epistemically justified and, hence, that we must suspend judgment once and for all because none of the available theories of justification can satisfy those requirements.

As for the third reason, consider the following passage:

> In order for us to get a more accurate understanding of these oppositions, I will expound the modes by means of which suspension of judgment is brought about, without making any

[12] Cauchy (1986: 337), Palmer (2000: 365–366, 373), and Striker (2001: 120–121) maintain that the Pyrrhonist's use of the Agrippan modes shows that he is committed to such a negative view.

[13] Cf. Williams (1988: 581), Fogelin (1994: 115–116), Bailey (2002: 259–262), and Striker (2004: 16).

[14] See the texts quoted in Barnes (1990: 36–38, 47, 58–59, 76), also Long (2006: 48–51).

> assertion (διαβεβαιούμενος) either about their number or about their power (τῆς δυνάμεως). For it is possible that they are unsound (σαθρούς) and that there are more than those which will be discussed. (*PH* I 35)

This passage is the final section of the chapter that is supposed to offer a general presentation of the modes of suspension, although its content actually provides a very compressed summary of what we find in the exposition of the Ten Modes. Moreover, after enumerating those modes and before explaining each of them in detail, Sextus points out: "We make these remarks about their number according to what is persuasive; about their power we make the following" (*PH* I 39). These two points notwithstanding, there is no reason to think that the caveat at *PH* I 35 does not apply equally well to the Five and the Two Modes.[15] If so, then Sextus refrains from asserting that those modes are sound arguments.

Since the Pyrrhonist is not committed to the Agrippan modes, and consequently does not avail himself of these modes to convince us that no belief is ever epistemically justified, his use of them is not at variance with his ongoing open-minded inquiry into truth. It should be noted, though, that the Pyrrhonist's lack of commitment to the Agrippan modes does not preclude him from using them in his own investigations. For all he knows, these modes may be the right touchstone for testing the various competing views under investigation. The requirements on justified belief that underlie the Agrippan modes seem to be impossible to meet, since no belief appears to be non-inferentially justified. However, the Pyrrhonist, in keeping with his agnostic skepticism, does not rule out either the possibility of eventually finding a belief that enjoys non-inferential justification or the possibility of realizing that one or more of the beliefs he has already examined actually enjoy(s) non-inferential justification.[16]

Now, even though the Pyrrhonist does not endorse the requirements on justified belief underlying the Agrippan modes, it seems plausible that those requirements still exert some sort of psychological influence on him. Before his 'conversion' to skepticism, he probably endorsed those requirements. Although *qua* Pyrrhonist he no longer endorses them, it is reasonable to suppose that his past commitment continues to exert some sort of influence on him in such a way that he instinctively finds unacceptable an argument that is circular, or a chain of justification that does not come to an end, or a claim that is made without offering any reasons in its support. We may therefore say that, in a sense, the Pyrrhonist assents to the requirements on justification underlying the Agrippan modes. But such assent is to be understood as non-doxastic, since it merely consists in yielding to, or acquiescing in, the appearances or affections that are forced upon him (see *PH* I 13, 19, 193; cf. *PH* I 230). We

[15] Note, first, that Sextus frequently appeals to the Five Modes in his presentation of the Ten. Second, the relativity mode is both one of the Ten Modes and one of the Five Modes. Third, we may suppose that, if Sextus is cautious enough to refrain from affirming that the Ten Modes are sound, he is equally cautious with respect to the Five and the Two Modes.

[16] *Pace* Palmer (2000: 356–357, 359, 364–365, 373), Striker (2001: 120–122, 127), and Bailey (2002: 265).

should remember, once more, that apparent things are the Pyrrhonist's criterion of action (*PH* I 21–22) and induce his assent involuntarily (*PH* I 19). This criterion is fourfold, one of its parts being the guidance of nature, which is the factor by virtue of which he is naturally capable of perceiving and thinking (*PH* I 24). We may reasonably assume that the Pyrrhonist's natural capability of thinking includes the use of certain ordinary and philosophical requirements on justification. Such a use is not the result of a doxastic commitment to those requirements, but rather something inculcated in him by, e.g., the education he received, the socio-cultural context in which he was raised and lives, and his training as a philosopher, factors that have shaped his intellectual appearances. The non-doxastic assent in question explains why the Pyrrhonist's use of the Agrippan modes induces suspension not only in his dogmatic rivals—when his argumentative therapy is effective—but also in himself. There is of course a crucial difference between the dogmatist and the Pyrrhonist: whereas the former's suspension is to be understood as resulting from the endorsement of certain justificatory requirements, the latter's suspension is to be understood as resulting from a psychological constraint—a topic to which I will return in the next chapter.

4.4 Questionable Assumptions

The skeptical challenge raised by Agrippa's trilemma has attracted much attention among contemporary philosophers, some of whom have argued that the trilemma rests on controversial presuppositions. Their interpretations of the trilemma seem to pose a serious problem for the Pyrrhonist's argumentative strategy because they allegedly show that the trilemma is based on a conception of justification that is neither unquestionable nor universally shared. I will argue, however, that such interpretations fail to take proper account of both the Pyrrhonist's *ad hominem* use of the Agrippan modes and the epistemic significance of the mode from disagreement.

Michael Williams (1999, 2004) maintains that there are two distinct ways of dealing with the challenge posed by the Modes of Agrippa. One is the "direct" approach, which takes these modes "more or less at face value, accepting the skeptic's options while trying to put a better face on one of them" (2004: 124). The problem of this approach is that, once the challenge is accepted, it cannot be met. The other way is the "diagnostic" approach, which claims that the set of Agrippan modes "does not fall naturally out of everyday ideas about knowledge and justification, but rather trades on unacknowledged and problematic theoretical preconceptions" (2004: 125). The advantage of this diagnosis, which dispels the Agrippan modes' "air of intuitiveness" by showing that they distort our everyday epistemic practices, is that, once we give up the theoretical presuppositions underlying them, their challenge may be declined. Those contentious presuppositions constitute what Williams calls the "Prior Grounding" conception of justification. According to this conception, it is always epistemically irresponsible to hold a belief on inadequate grounds—grounds being evidence to which the believer has cognitive access and in

virtue of which he holds the belief in question (2004: 128–129). In other words, epistemic responsibility is linked with grounding, which in turn is identified with the possession of citable evidence. Williams maintains that this view should be abandoned in favor of a "Default and Challenge" conception of justification, since this is in accord with our ordinary epistemic procedures.[17] According to such a conception, "a person is entitled to a belief in the absence of appropriate 'defeaters', i.e., reasons to think that he is *not* so entitled" (2004: 132). In the absence of concrete challenges entered in a particular situation or context, there is no obligation to give reasons when laying a claim to knowledge. If Williams is right, then the possible use of the modes of infinite regress, reciprocity, and hypothesis to induce suspension by themselves would be arbitrary. For such a use demands, as we saw in Sect. 4.2, that one offer grounds for any claim even in the absence of a disagreement that could be taken as a challenge to the claim in question. It should be noted, though, that Williams also rejects the idea that the existence of a disagreement should automatically trigger a demand for justification, because there is no reason why the mere fact that a person's view is not shared by others should "place a severe justificatory burden" on that person (2004: 134).

From the perspective of experimental philosophy, Shaun Nichols, Stephen Stich, and Jonathan Weinberg contend that, contrary to what some epistemologists believe, the intuitions underlying the arguments for Cartesian or external world skepticism are not universal, i.e., "shared by everyone (or almost everyone) who thinks reflectively about knowledge" (2003: 227).[18] Their study is based on the results of both a series of experiments they conducted themselves and two research projects in cross-cultural psychology conducted by others. They maintain that the evidence suggests that "many of the intuitions epistemologists invoke vary with the cultural background, socio-economic status, and educational background of the person offering the intuition" (2003: 227), and that "the appeal of skeptical arguments is culturally local and that this fact justifies a kind of 'meta-skepticism' since it suggests that crucial premises in the arguments for skepticism are not to be trusted" (2003: 228). Even though they limit their study to Cartesian skepticism, the authors point out that the principles underlying Agrippa's trilemma, too, are supported by intuitions, and that "those concerned with [Agrippan skepticism] may well want to worry that something similar to the argument […] against the Cartesian might at some later date find a Pyrrhonian target" (2003: 246–247 n. 4). If the preliminary and tentative conclusion the authors draw regarding Cartesian skepticism were correct and if it could be applied to Agrippan Pyrrhonism, then one should acknowledge that this form of skepticism, too, seems to depend on factors such as cultural context, socio-economic status, and educational background (including philosophical training), and hence that the appeal of Agrippa's trilemma is context-dependent.

[17] Williams (2011: 130) calls this conception of justification "default and query."

[18] By "intuition" they understand "a spontaneous judgement about the truth or falsity of a proposition—a judgement for which the person making the judgement may be able to offer little or no further justification" (2003: 246 n. 3).

The two views just expounded are similar in that they claim or suggest that the modes that constitute the trilemma depend on, or are relative to, a certain epistemological, cultural, educational, or socio-economic framework, and hence that there is no reason we should accept their conclusions as inescapable. If so, then the skeptical challenge posed by the Agrippan trilemma is much less epistemically significant than the Pyrrhonist might think. This seeming relativity of the trilemma would not, however, represent a problem for the Pyrrhonist, since he would not deny that the trilemma works only within a certain conception of justification. Pyrrhonian arguments are to a large extent parasitic upon the philosophical doctrines or theories of those against whom the Pyrrhonist argues. Hence, as long as there continue to be dogmatists who are committed to the requirements on justification underlying or driving the trilemma, the Pyrrhonist will have a reason to use this argumentative weapon. Given that his style of argumentation is chameleonic, if his dogmatic rivals adopted a different conception of justification, the Pyrrhonist would adapt to this new context and would try to elaborate other modes that would rest on that different conception. The two interpretations of Agrippan Pyrrhonism under consideration do not therefore undermine the Pyrrhonist's argumentative strategy.

Peter Klein is aware of the *ad hominem* character of the Five Modes.[19] In particular, he claims that the Pyrrhonist takes the premises employed in the modes of infinite regress and reciprocity from Aristotle's foundationalist conception of justification.[20] This fact significantly restricts those modes' generality and power. The reason is, according to Klein, that there are alternative theories—namely, infinitism and coherentism—that conceive of epistemic justification in such a way that they reject some of the assumptions of the Aristotelian conception, and that therefore accept that regress and reciprocal arguments can produce conclusions that are epistemically justified (Klein, 2011; cf. Klein, 2008). What Klein overlooks, however, is that although the fact that the modes of infinite regress and reciprocity rely on a given conception of justification does restrict their generality and power, we should not forget that the Pyrrhonist still has at his disposal the mode from disagreement. He would emphasize the second-order disagreement between the different conceptions of justification, and would ask which one should be preferred: foundationalism, infinitism, or coherentism? To make matters worse, to these three more traditional solutions to the epistemic regress problem, we should add the contextualist and the externalist. Thus, setting aside the foundationalist conception of justification does not automatically leave us with an unquestionable epistemological theory. If we take into account the present-day debate on the epistemic significance of peer disagreement that was mentioned in Sect. 4.2 and that will be examined in

[19] Williams (1988), too, is aware of this fact, as is Williams (2015). So, we should probably read Williams (1999, 2004) as offering a critical evaluation of Agrippa's trilemma that is not concerned with how the Pyrrhonist himself used the trilemma.

[20] Scholars consider it probable that the Five Modes were inspired by the first book of Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*, where he discusses arguments corresponding to the modes of infinite regress, reciprocity, and hypothesis. See Barnes (1990: 121–122) and Long (2006: 48–51), also Anagnostopoulos (1993: 116–118), Bett (1999: 27–29), and Striker (2001: 126–127; 2004: 21).

Chap. 6, we can ask: how are we supposed to resolve the dispute between present-day foundationalists, coherentists, infinitists, contextualists, and externalists, given that there seem to be no discernible epistemic differences between the five groups? That is, the members of the different camps seem to be epistemic peers insofar as they are all competent epistemologists who are familiar with the relevant arguments and theories concerning justification, and they are all aware of the pertinent conceptual analyses and distinctions. There seems to be no non-question-begging way of adjudicating the debate between the supporters of the five epistemological theories under consideration. To make matters worse, within each group the members are far from agreeing, so that we also need to find a reliable touchstone for choosing between the different variants of the same general theories. Dispassionate reflection on such peer disputes seems to lead us to agnostic skepticism.

Note also that, confronted with Williams's claim that the epistemological ideas underlying the Agrippan trilemma are not natural or intuitive because they exaggerate or distort some aspects of our ordinary epistemic procedures, the Pyrrhonist would make use, once again, of the mode from disagreement. For he would argue that we are faced with two conflicting conceptions of justification (philosophical and ordinary), and that this conflict cannot be resolved by assuming arbitrarily that our everyday epistemic practices are to be preferred. Just as it could be argued that (certain) philosophical theories of justification are extreme and unintuitive, so too could it be argued that ordinary epistemic procedures are incoherent and arbitrary. In this case, too, we need a non-question-begging way of resolving the dispute between the rival conceptions of justification. Hence, saying that certain challenges should be dismissed because they are raised in an everyday justificatory context is not enough to defend some of our beliefs against the Pyrrhonian attack. The reason is, once again, that the mode from disagreement poses a serious epistemological challenge independently of Agrippa's trilemma.

The emphasis on the challenge posed by the mode from disagreement may prompt an objection that points to another alleged questionable assumption underlying Agrippan Pyrrhonism: this form of skepticism poses a threat only if one accepts some version of epistemic internalism. More precisely, Agrippan Pyrrhonism seems to rely on a dialectical conception of justification,[21] and since this is a highly dubious epistemological view, that form of skepticism loses much of its force and appeal. There are several possible formulations of the dialectical conception of justification, but I will focus on the following:

> *Dialectical Conception of Justification (DCJ)*
> An assertion that *p* that one has made to express one's belief that *p* is epistemically justified if and only if, when legitimately challenged by one's interlocutor, one can defend it by offering potentially persuasive reasons for it.[22]

[21] Among others, Rescorla (2009a, b), Aikin (2011), and Wieland (2013) maintain that the Pyrrhonist relies on this conception of justification.

[22] Among the proponents of this conception of justification, some maintain that all claims must be defended merely because they have been challenged, whereas others contend that some claims have a privileged status because of which they do not require defense when challenged. For a pre-

I talk of reasons that are *persuasive* to convey the idea that the reasons one offers in defense of one's assertion cannot beg the question. I say that the reasons are *potentially* persuasive because it is not required that one's interlocutor be in fact persuaded by one's reasons inasmuch as he may be, e.g., biased or stubborn. I refer to challenges that are *legitimate* in order to include both the view of those who claim that brute challenges are irrelevant inasmuch as they are not backed up by reasons for doubt, and the view of those who claim that any challenge, even a brute one, is appropriate. Also, this formulation of DCJ refers to those assertions that are made to express beliefs, without entering into the debate about whether every assertion expresses a belief, i.e., whether there are cases in which one may assert that *p* without believing that *p*. Now, some authors maintain that a feature of assertion that distinguishes it from other speech acts is that making an assertion generates a specific commitment that the asserter can be blamed for failing to meet, namely, the commitment to articulate reasons for making the assertion when it is legitimately challenged by one's interlocutor. The commitment to defend the assertion in the face of a legitimate challenge can be cancelled only if the speaker retracts the assertion. Hence, by making an assertion, one enters the game of giving and asking for reasons. Or at least one enters such a game when the assertion is made in a dialectical context in which the interlocutors assess the assertion's credentials by providing each other with arguments and counterarguments.

The objection against Pyrrhonism under consideration can take two forms. First, it can be argued that dialectical ability has nothing to do with epistemic justification, and hence that the Pyrrhonist confuses norms of markedly different kinds. Quite a few authors claim that one may be justified in believing that *p* even if, when challenged, one is unable to provide the challenger with reasons for one's belief. The examples most cited are beliefs based on testimony, perception, and memory; those that are presupposed in ordinary conversation; and those held by infants. Michael Rescorla (2009a, b), for instance, sees a sharp separation between the state of being justified in believing a proposition and the ability to justify an asserted proposition to one's interlocutor, and so claims that it is a mistake to try to derive conclusions about either of them on the basis of the examination of the other. If this first form of the objection is correct, then Agrippan Pyrrhonism might at most show that there is dialectical symmetry between the disagreeing parties, not epistemic symmetry. The second form that the objection can take consists in relating dialectical ability to discursive justification and in arguing that, although discursive justification constitutes a type of epistemic justification, it does not exhaust the range of epistemic justification inasmuch as there is also externalist justification and perhaps non-discursive internalist justification (Gerken, 2012).

It is undeniable that, at least most of the time, Sextus deploys the Five Modes in a dialectical context. The reason for this is to be found in the emphasis he lays on the phenomenon of disagreement and on the practice of argumentative debate.

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sentation and critical discussion of these two views of dialectical justification, see Rescorla (2009a, b), who dubs them "dialectical egalitarianism" and "dialectical foundationalism," respectively.

Earlier, I claimed that the mode from disagreement is not merely a psychological aid for inducing suspension, one of the reasons being that the existence of a dispute may trigger a demand for justification. That mode seems to presuppose that, in order to be justified in making an assertion, one should be able to provide one's rivals with reasons for the assertion in question, independently of whether or not one succeeds in convincing or persuading them. Still, I think the Pyrrhonist could offer the following replies to the objection under consideration.

First, it is intriguing that, even though the great majority of contemporary epistemologists who discuss Pyrrhonian skepticism completely set aside the mode from disagreement, they interpret Agrippa's trilemma in dialectical or conversational terms. Although there is nothing wrong with this interpretation because the trilemma can be used in such a manner, it seems that the Agrippan challenge can be stated non-dialectically or non-conversationally, in a way that shows that it concerns the structure of justification: even in the absence of a challenger that questions one's assertion that *p*, one may ask oneself why one makes the assertion (cf. Williams, 1999: 40–41). If talking about assertion strikes one as discursive, then let us say that one may always ask oneself why one holds the belief that *p*. And one may keep asking the same question until one has to opt for one of the options that are targeted by Agrippa's trilemma. It might be argued that DCJ is still in play here insofar as such personal questioning amounts to some sort of inner dialogue. For in one's own head one could play the role of a potential opponent and challenge one's belief by asking for citable evidence or reasons. However, one's belief may be epistemically justified even though one is unable to cite the reasons that ground that belief not only to others *but also to oneself*. In reply, I would first note that *any* critical reflection could be interpreted along similar lines, i.e., as some sort of inner dialogue in which one plays the role of a potential challenger. Second, I think that the inability to trace the reasons or grounds for one's beliefs should be more disturbing than usually recognized. For that means that one is unable to decide whether one's beliefs are based on rationally grounded considerations or are rather the result of the influence of epistemically contaminating factors. I will have more to say about this in Chaps. 7 and 8.

Second, the Pyrrhonist could offer different explanations of his use of the mode from disagreement and of the Agrippan trilemma in a dialectical setting that does not presuppose any doxastic commitment on his part. To begin with, he could remark that he is arguing in an *ad hominem* manner, basing his argumentative strategy on his rivals' epistemological commitments. He observes that dogmatists disagree about any possible topic of investigation and that they try to persuade each other of the correctness of their views either by defending them by means of arguments or by attacking their opponents' views by means of counterarguments. Dogmatists thus seem to take their rivals' disagreement as posing an epistemic challenge they need to meet, to believe that their rivals must address the objections they raise, and to assume that at least most claims can be legitimately challenged. Since the Pyrrhonist is engaging with an interlocutor who endorses DCJ, he must chameleonically adapt to the context in which he finds himself. We should not forget that Greek philosophy was, at least to a considerable extent, practiced orally and agonistically, through reasoned dialogue and debate. In the contemporary scene, a

neo-Pyrrhonist would similarly argue that he adapts to a context in which many philosophers seem to adopt a dialectical or discursive conception of justification. Relatedly, the Pyrrhonist could also observe that, as a matter of fact, he is psychologically influenced by a conception of justification and a conception of assertion that he used to endorse or that happen to prevail in his socio-cultural and philosophical milieu, without this implying strong or doxastic assent to them. He would also point out that, given the entrenched and unsettled controversies between dogmatists to which he is witness, whenever he is presented with a disputed view and urged to endorse it, he cannot but ask both whether there is any reason why he should endorse that view instead of rival ones and how it could be defended from the objections raised to it. Perhaps this reaction is determined by his socio-cultural and philosophical context in which reasoned debate is the norm, but it is not clear how else someone who is exposed to a dispute on a matter on which he holds no views should react. Lastly, if the decision not to respond to a challenge from someone who disagrees with one were regarded as a sign of intellectual arrogance, which is an attitude Sextus views as characteristic of dogmatism, then that may be a strong reason for the Pyrrhonist to prefer the practice of giving and asking for reasons. Once again, his rejection of intellectual arrogance is to be interpreted as molded by contingent factors such as his socio-cultural and philosophical milieu and his personal experiences rather than as grounded in a normative principle.

Third, the Pyrrhonist would call attention to the dispute about DCJ. For, although this conception of justification has been rejected by intelligent and well-informed epistemologists, it has also been defended by other epistemologists who seem to be no less intelligent and well informed.[23] Far from being a problem for the Pyrrhonist, this second-order disagreement would be grist for his skeptical mill, as suspension seems called for as long as that disagreement is not resolved in a non-question-begging way. He would also ask the detractors of DCJ how they think the disagreement is to be resolved: by providing reasons for the competing views or by simply taking the correctness of one of them for granted?

4.5 The Argument from Possible Disagreement

In this penultimate section, I would like to examine a special version of the mode from disagreement. In *Pyrrhonian Outlines*, Sextus makes use of an argument based upon the possibility of disagreement that is designed to produce an opposition whenever one is confronted with an argument to which at present one cannot oppose a countervailing argument. Analyzing this argument from possible disagreement is important because it seems to be at variance with both the definition of skepticism and the skeptic's open-minded inquiry into truth.

[23] Among those who endorse DCJ are Annis (1978), Williams (2004), Leite (2005), Aikin (2011), and Lammenranta (2011a, b, 2013); and among those who reject it are Alston (1989), Audi (1993), Williamson (2007), Rescorla (2009a, b), and Kelly (2010).

Sextus offers five versions of the argument. The first is found in the chapter that presents the modes leading to suspension (*PH* I 31–35). Sextus points out that there are different kinds of oppositions, one of which is that between present things and past or future things. The example he gives of this type of opposition is the following:

> Whenever someone propounds to us an argument that we are not able to refute, we say to him: "Just as before the birth of the founder of the school to which you belong, the argument of the school, which is sound, was not yet apparent but was nonetheless really there in nature, so too is it possible that the argument opposing the one you are now propounding is really there in nature but is not yet apparent to us, so that we should not yet assent to what now seems to be a strong argument." (*PH* I 33–34)

According to this line of thought, even though at present one cannot counter an argument advanced by a dogmatist, one should nonetheless be cautious and refrain from assenting to it because one cannot rule out the possibility that, in the future, one will discover a rival argument that will appear to be as strong as the argument that is currently under consideration. The disagreement between arguments is not actual, but merely possible.[24]

The second version of the argument is found in the exposition of the Second Mode of Aenesidemus, which lays emphasis on the differences among humans. At one point, Sextus observes that we must believe either all humans or only some of them. The first alternative is ruled out because it implies believing opposing views, whereas the second leads us to suspension of judgment because there is an undecidable dispute about whom we should assent to (*PH* I 88). To the proposal that we should assent to the majority, Sextus replies by arguing that it is childish,

> since no one can visit all humans and determine what pleases the majority, it being possible that among some nations of which we have no knowledge the things that are rare among us are usual for the majority, whereas the things that happen to most of us are there rare—for instance, that most people when bitten by venomous spiders do not suffer whereas some rarely suffer. (*PH* I 89)

This version of the argument differs from the previous one in that the argument is used in the discussion of an actual present dispute, namely, the dispute about whom we should assent to. This dispute cannot be resolved in part because in the future a disagreement might arise about what the majority's opinion is if we acquired knowledge of some currently unknown nations. But the argumentative pattern is the same: the reason one should not at present assent to a given claim (in this case, the one expressing the opinion of the majority in our nation) is the possibility of a future disagreement. It might be thought that the present version of the argument also differs from the preceding one in that it does not refer to something that might arise in the future—namely, a new argument—but rather to something that may be the case right now—namely, the existence of certain nations unknown to us in which what is rare for us is common for them. Note, however, that the first version of the

[24] Flückiger (1990: 50), Striker (2001: 128), and Spinelli (2005: 52 n. 10) think that the argument expounded in the quoted passage is an inductive argument Sextus puts forward *in propria persona*. But if the argument is indeed inductive, then, given that Sextus explicitly attacks induction at *PH* II 204, it must be *ad hominem*.

argument, too, refers to something that may be the case at present inasmuch as Sextus remarks that the rival argument that is not yet apparent may already be there in nature. This might mean that the concepts with which one could form the premises of the future argument or (some of) the premises themselves, as well as the rule of inference employed in it, are already available at present. Thus, just as in the future one might discover a nation of whose existence one is presently unaware, so too might one discover an argument of whose components one is presently unaware.

In the third version of the argument, Sextus points out that, even if it is granted that humans are the criterion by which things must be judged, it will first be necessary to resolve the disagreement about which person should be taken as such a criterion. If the dogmatists said that it is the Sage, one would ask them which Sage, but they would not agree on the answer (*PH* II 37–38). If they claimed that we should instead take as criterion the person who at present is more intelligent than all others, there would still be two problems: (i) they would disagree about who is more intelligent than the others, and (ii) even if they agreed about who, among all people past and present, is more intelligent, it would not be possible to take him as criterion (*PH* II 39). The reason for (ii) is that, given that there is an almost infinite variation in intelligence,

> we say that it is possible for someone else to be born who is more intelligent than the man who we say is more intelligent than those of the past and the present. Hence, just as we are required to believe the one who, because of his intelligence, is now said to be wiser than those of the present and the past, so too is it necessary to believe the more intelligent one who will exist after him. And when that one is born, it is necessary to expect in turn that someone else more intelligent than he will be born, and someone else more intelligent than he, and so on *ad infinitum*. And it is non-evident whether they will agree with one another or will disagree in what they say. For this reason, even if someone is acknowledged to be more intelligent than those of the past and the present, given that we cannot say affirmatively that no one will be more sagacious than he (for that is non-evident), it will always be necessary to wait for the judgment of the one who will later be more intelligent than he and never assent to the one who is presently superior. (*PH* II 40–41)

A difference between this version of the argument and the previous ones is that the former does not refer to something that may be happening right now, but to something that might happen in the future, namely, the birth of someone who might turn out to be more intelligent than the person who we now say is more intelligent than those of the past and the present. But like the previous versions, the present one draws attention to the possibility of a future disagreement: since someone more intelligent than the person who is currently more intelligent than all others might be born and they might disagree in their judgments, one should refrain from accepting what the latter affirms to be the case. As in the second version of the argument, the reference to a possible disagreement is intended to block one of the attempts to resolve an actual present disagreement, namely, the dispute over which person should be considered the criterion by which things must be judged.[25]

[25] Sextus also makes use of the third version of the argument in his discussion of the criterion through which things must be judged (*PH* II 61).

The fourth version of the argument is found in the course of the discussion of whether there is anything good or bad by nature. After referring to several disagreements among laws and customs, Sextus remarks that

> even if regarding some cases we cannot immediately state a variation, it must be said that it is possible that in some nations unknown to us there is disagreement also about them. Hence, just as, if we had not known, for example, about the Egyptians' custom of marrying their sisters, we would have wrongly affirmed that it is agreed by all that people must not marry their sisters, so likewise, regarding those matters in which we find no variations (ἐν οἷς οὐχ ὑποπίπτουσιν ἡμῖν ἀνωμαλίαι), it is not apposite to affirm that there is no disagreement about them, given that it is possible, as I said, that among some of the nations unknown to us there is disagreement about them. (*PH* III 233–234)

The possibility that in the future we will discover currently unknown nations in which the customs and laws we unanimously regard as correct are subject to disagreement should make us refrain from endorsing them. For we are faced with a possible disagreement between our judgment about those laws and customs and the judgment of those who, in a possibly existing nation of which we have no current knowledge, reject them, and it is not clear how such a disagreement could be resolved.

Lastly, in the Ninth Mode of Aenesidemus, which is that based on rare or frequent encounters, Sextus tells us:

> Rare things, too, are thought to be valuable, but not at all the things that are familiar to us and easy to get. For example, if we conceived of water as being rare, how much more valuable it would appear to us than all the things that are now thought to be valuable! Or if we imagined gold as simply scattered in quantities over the ground like stones, to whom would we suppose that it would then be valuable or worth hoarding? (*PH* I 143)

This passage can be interpreted as referring to the possibility of disagreement: if gold were a metal easily found in large amounts, then one would value it much less than one does, which reveals a disagreement between one's actual and counterfactual beliefs about the true value of gold. Being unable to resolve this disagreement, one is forced to suspend judgment about the real value of gold. We may legitimately suppose that Sextus would gladly apply the same line of argument to other matters. For example, if one had been born and raised in a different community or if one had been educated at a different philosophical school, then one's moral, political, or religious beliefs would probably conflict with those one currently holds. In following such a line of argument, Sextus could have used material from his exposition of the Tenth Mode (*PH* I 145–163) and his discussion of the ethical part of philosophy (*PH* III 198–234), where he reviews disagreements that arise by producing oppositions among distinct ways of life, customs, laws, mythical beliefs, and dogmatic suppositions. One might of course be lucky enough to, e.g., have been born and raised in a community whose way of life, customs, and laws are such that they enable one to acquire true moral, political, or religious beliefs. The problem is how one can justifiably establish that the way of life, customs, and laws of one's community are indeed more reliable than those of a different community in which one could have been born and raised, and under whose influence one would have formed different beliefs. Since one finds oneself unable to resolve the disagreement between

one's actual and counterfactual moral, political, or religious beliefs, suspension of judgment seems called for.

The passages under discussion seem to pose two problems for Sextus. The first is that, given that they do not refer to actual oppositions between two apparently equipollent claims or arguments, the way suspension is supposed to be induced according to the argument from possible disagreement is at variance with the definition of skepticism (*PH* I 8). For there is no real equipollence of the opposed claims or arguments simply because one of them is currently missing.[26] At *PH* I 34, Sextus explicitly says that he is opposing a present argument to a future one that is currently unavailable in the sense that it is not apparent to him. He should therefore assent to the argument he cannot refute at present rather than suspend judgment about the matter under investigation.[27] I think we can offer a solution to this problem. For it might be claimed that the argument that Sextus opposes to the one advanced by his dogmatic rival is not the argument that might be apparent in the future, but rather the argument from possible disagreement itself. That is to say, when the skeptic considers an argument for *p* to which at present he cannot oppose an argument for not-*p*, he opposes to it the argument from possible disagreement. This argument, which is based on the awareness of the limits of one's current epistemic situation, is strong enough to make the skeptic refrain from assenting to the conclusion of the argument for *p*: he finds both arguments equally persuasive. This solution applies not only to *PH* I 33–34 but to the other passages as well. For one may argue that the skeptic opposes the argument from possible disagreement to the arguments that claim that we must endorse the opinion of the person who is more intelligent than those of the past and the present, or the customs and laws on which we all agree, or the opinion of the majority, or the shared judgments about the intrinsic value of certain things. We could interpret the skeptic's use of the argument as his way of avoiding the conceit and rashness that affect his dogmatic patients (*PH* III 280–281). Indeed, because of his arrogant confidence in his capacity to apprehend the truth, the dogmatist rashly assents to the conclusion of the argument he advances without considering the possibility that it might be countered either by an argument that has already been propounded but of which he has not yet heard, or by an argument that might be propounded in the future. In sum, the opposition of equipollent arguments found in the quoted passages can be taken to be not merely possible but actual, and therefore the use of the argument from possible disagreement is not necessarily at variance with Sextus's definition of skepticism. Now, it may be objected that the opposition in question is not what Sextus had in mind inasmuch as the first version of the argument is given as an example of an opposition between

[26] See de Olaso (1996: 256) and Striker (2001: 127). In their discussions of the argument from possible disagreement, Hankinson (1997: 21; 1998: 183–184, 303, 307) and Svavarsson (2014: 357) fail to realize that, in order for equipollence to be reached and hence for suspension to be induced, the opposed arguments must *at present* strike the skeptic as equally credible or persuasive.

[27] On the basis of *AD* II 473–475, Striker (2001: 127) maintains that Sextus should acquiesce in the argument he cannot refute at present. It should be noted, however, that at *PH* I 34 the kind of assent in question is doxastic, whereas at *AD* II 473–475 it is non-doxastic, as we saw in Chap. 3.4.

present and future things. If that is so, then my proposal should be viewed as the reply Sextus could give if pressed to explain how the use of the argument could be made compatible with his definition of skepticism.

The second problem posed by the argument from possible disagreement is the last of the six problems faced by Sextus's portrayal of the skeptic as an inquirer into truth: that argument may be read as making the case that we must suspend judgment about the nature of things once and for all because the search for truth is doomed to failure.[28] Indeed, the argument seems to be a maneuver designed to block any attempt to gain knowledge or justified belief: even if there is no current disagreement, one should nonetheless suspend judgment because a disagreement might arise and it is not clear how one could resolve it. This is at variance not only with the skeptic's open-minded inquiry, but also with my interpretation of his use of the Agrippan modes—including the mode from disagreement. Note, however, that nothing Sextus says in the passages quoted above rules out either the possibility that he will come to the conclusion that the argument from possible disagreement is unsound or the possibility that he will not find it as persuasive as the dogmatic argument he will happen to be considering. Hence, there is no reason to think that the argument from possible disagreement is designed to block any further investigation by making the case that the truth cannot be found.

Let me close this section by observing that the argument from possible disagreement might be taken to somewhat anticipate three arguments recently advanced in philosophy of science and epistemology. First, P. Kyle Stanford (2006) draws attention to what he calls "the problem of unconceived alternatives": the history of science gives us "strong reason to believe that there probably are serious alternatives to even our best current theories that are presently unconceived, despite being well confirmed by the evidence available to us" (2006: 28). Stanford thinks that the probable existence of such unconceived alternatives that can explain the data just as well provides us with a defeater for the theories we currently endorse.[29] Second, Nathan Ballantyne (2015) draws attention to what he calls "the problem of unpossessed evidence," which arises from the fact that there is evidence against our views that we know about but do not have. He thinks that awareness of such relevant unpossessed evidence provides *prima facie* defeaters for our views. Third, Ballantyne (2013) considers "the problem of historical variability," which stems from the idea that people's beliefs about difficult and controversial matters in morality, religion, politics, and philosophy vary with their different backgrounds. In his view, if one has reason to believe that one's belief that p in any of those areas is such that, if one's background had differed in certain respects, one would not have believed that p,

[28] See Cauchy (1986: 337), Hankinson (1998: 183), Palmer (2000: 355–356), Striker (2001: 127–128), and Marchand (2010: 134).

[29] Rowbottom (2019: chap. 3) extends Stanford's argument, remarking that, in addition to unconceived theories, there may also be unconceived observations, unconceived models and predictions, unconceived explanations, unconceived experiments, methods, and instruments, and unconceived values. He concludes that "*agnosticism* about the truthlikeness of contemporary theories (and the future direction of science with regard to truth) is prudent" (2019: 77).

then one's belief that *p* is irrational. It is plain that this third argument is different from the other two inasmuch as they do not appeal to counterfactuals. It is also plain that the argument from unconceived alternatives and the argument from unpossessed evidence are distinct: whereas the former appeals to defeaters for one's current view that *one thinks probably exist at present* and to which one might have access in the future, the latter appeals to defeaters for one's current view that *one knows exist at present* but to which one does not currently have access. Now, given that all but one version of the argument from possible disagreement appeal to defeating evidence for one's current view that one thinks might exist now rather than to defeating evidence for one's current view that one knows exists now, it might legitimately be taken to anticipate the argument from unconceived alternatives but not the argument from unpossessed evidence. Does the version of the argument from possible disagreement that appeals to counterfactuals anticipate the argument from historical variability? I think it does to the extent that both arguments refer to disagreements between one's actual self and one's counterfactual self—or, if one prefers, between one's actual and counterfactual beliefs about whether *p*.

4.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued, first, that the fact that Agrippa's trilemma can induce suspension independently of the mode from disagreement does not mean that disagreement plays a secondary role in Pyrrhonism. For the skeptic may regard the conflicting views on a given topic as equipollent, and hence suspend judgment, without appealing to the trilemma. Second, the skeptic's use of the Agrippan modes is not incompatible with his engagement in truth-directed inquiry because he uses them in a purely dialectical manner: he himself does not claim that no belief is ever epistemically justified and that the search for truth is therefore doomed to failure, but rather remarks that this is a conclusion that his dogmatic rivals seem forced to accept given the requirements on justification they themselves endorse. The dialectical use of the Agrippan modes does not, however, prevent the skeptic from non-doxastically assenting to them on account of the influence of factors such as the education he received and his professional training. Third, if one takes into account both the dialectical use of those modes and the epistemic challenge posed by disagreement, then one can offer a reply to those who maintain that Agrippan Pyrrhonism can be neutralized by uncovering the problematic theoretical assumptions on which it rests.

As regards the argument from possible disagreement, I have argued for two points. First, the use of the argument can be interpreted in such a way as to make it compatible with Sextus's definition of skepticism: there is an equipollent opposition that is actual because what is being opposed to the argument for *p* that the skeptic is presently considering is not an argument against *p* that might be available in the future, but rather the argument from possible disagreement itself. Second, the skeptic's use of this argument is not at variance with his ongoing truth-directed inquiry

because he rules out neither the possibility that he will come to the conclusion that the argument is unsound nor the possibility that he will not find it as persuasive as the argument he will happen to be considering.

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Chapter 5
Pyrrhonian Rationality

Abstract Is the Pyrrhonist committed to the requirements of rationality? Or is he rather an anti-rationalist? The present chapter offers answers to these questions by examining the Pyrrhonist's stance on the law of non-contradiction, his conception of suspension of judgment, and his use of reason. It is argued that the Pyrrhonist is neither a rationalist nor an anti-rationalist and that his outlook is perhaps best described as a deflationary rationalism.

Keywords Anti-rationalism · Deflationary rationalism · Doxastic detachment · Heraclitus · Law of non-contradiction · Protagoras · Requirement of rationality · Suspension of judgment

5.1 Introduction

Is the Pyrrhonist committed to the requirements of rationality? Or is he rather an anti-rationalist? These are the questions I intend to answer in this chapter by exploring the Pyrrhonist's stance on the law of non-contradiction (LNC), his conception of suspension of judgment, and his use of reason. I will have more to say about these issues in Chap. 10, where I will examine the Pyrrhonist's outlook from the perspective of contemporary theories of rationality.

Here is a roadmap of the chapter. In Sect. 5.2, I briefly present and analyze the LNC by focusing on the three versions of this law found in Aristotle. In Sect. 5.3, I lay out the reasons why the Pyrrhonist is supposed to endorse the LNC and look at the Sextan passages that seem to show that such is the case. Then, in Sect. 5.4, I examine some passages that can be taken as conclusive evidence that the Pyrrhonist is not actually committed to the LNC, but rather suspends judgment about its truth. In Sect. 5.5, I argue that his suspending judgment about the truth of the LNC does not imply that he does not observe certain qualified versions of this law. I also argue that the reason he makes use of the dogmatic versions of the LNC has to do with the therapeutic and dialectical side of his philosophy discussed in Chap. 3. In Sect. 5.6, I focus on the question of whether Pyrrhonian suspension is merely a psychological reaction or rather a doxastic attitude the Pyrrhonist adopts as a result of his

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commitment to a requirement of rationality. In Sect. 5.7, I examine his extensive yet detached use of reason and address the question of whether his stance should be depicted as a form of rationalism or anti-rationalism. In Sect. 5.8, I offer some concluding remarks.

5.2 Versions of the LNC

Three versions of the LNC have been distinguished on the basis of Aristotle's discussion of this law in *Metaphysics* Γ.[1] These versions may be formulated as follows:[2]

> *Ontological Version*
> It is impossible for the same thing to have a property and not to have it at the same time and in the same respect (cf. *Metaphysics* Γ 3 1005b19–20, 4 1007b17–18, 6 1011b17–18, 21–22). In other words: it is impossible for x to have property F and not to have F at the same time and in the same respect.
>
> *Logical Version*
> It is impossible for opposite propositions to be true at the same time (cf. *Met.* Γ 6 1011b13–17, 20–21; 8 1012b2–3). This version is sometimes called "semantic" or "propositional." The symbolic form is: $\neg (p \,\&\, \neg p)$.
>
> *Doxastic Version*
> It is impossible to simultaneously believe that x is F and that x is not F (cf. *Met.* Γ 3 1005b23–26, 1005b29–31).

Some remarks about these three versions of the LNC are in order. First, the ontological version tells us how things in the world can and cannot be. This obvious remark will be important when examining the Pyrrhonist's attitude towards the LNC. Second, the logical version is commonly construed as depending on the ontological version. Indeed, given that a proposition affirms or denies that an object has a given property, the reason two opposite propositions cannot be true simultaneously is that objects in the world cannot have opposite properties at the same time. Third, the doxastic version may be interpreted descriptively or normatively. That is to say, it may be interpreted either as the empirical claim that inconsistent beliefs cannot exist simultaneously in one mind, or as the normative claim that one cannot rationally hold inconsistent beliefs at the same time—or that one ought not to hold inconsistent beliefs at the same time because doing so is irrational (cf. Gottlieb, 2019: sect. 1). Fourth, in its normative sense, the doxastic formulation may be taken to rest on the logical formulation, since it might be argued that the reason it is irrational to hold inconsistent beliefs at the same time is that the propositions that express them cannot be true simultaneously. Lastly, understood descriptively, the doxastic version makes an assertion about the nature of the human mind, since it

[1] On Aristotle's discussion of the LNC, see, e.g., Łukasiewicz (1971), Cassin and Narcy (1989), Wedin (1999, 2000, 2003, 2004a, b), Priest (2006: chap. 1), and Gottlieb (2019).

[2] The following taxonomy is based on Łukasiewicz (1971: 487–488) and Gottlieb (2019: sect. 1).

claims that we are unable to simultaneously hold inconsistent beliefs at the same time. Although it might be argued that the doxastic version rests on the ontological version (cf. *Met.* Γ 3 1005b26–32), it is clear that the doxastic version construed descriptively could be true even if one proved the falsity of the ontological version. For it could be the case that, even if it were possible for *x* to be both *F* and not *F* at the same time and in the same respect, we would nonetheless be unable to conceive of such a state of affairs and, hence, to simultaneously believe that *x* is *F* and that it is not *F*.

5.3 The Skeptic's Alleged Commitment to the LNC

There are at least two reasons to think that the Pyrrhonist endorses the LNC. The first is that it is Sextus's observance of the LNC that makes it possible for us to understand his writings. For example, if he did not observe that law, we would be unable to comprehend the "general account" of Pyrrhonism in the first book of *PH*: Sextus ascribes definite meanings to the words used in his explanations of, *inter alia*, the skeptic's criterion, the aim of skepticism, the modes of suspension, and the skeptical phrases. Let us focus on this last item. The skeptical phrases (φωναί) are employed by the Pyrrhonist to describe his experiences and outlook, and Sextus carefully explains the sense in which each phrase must be understood so that his readers do not ascribe dogmatic views to the Pyrrhonist: the skeptical phrases are not assertions about non-evident matters but reports of the Pyrrhonist's own appearances or affections (*PH* I 187–208). Thus, Sextus must observe the LNC if he wants to say something he takes to be meaningful and if he wants to make himself understood (cf. *Met.* Γ 4 1006a21–31, 7 1012a21–24, 8 1012b5–8).

The second reason to think that the Pyrrhonist endorses the LNC is that belief in this law is a necessary condition for suspension of judgment. Faced with conflicts of appearances, the Pyrrhonist attempts to decide which appearances are true and which are false because the same thing cannot have opposite properties at the same time and in the same respect. But since he cannot make that decision, he finds himself compelled to suspend judgment. For example, given that (i) honey appears sweet to some people and bitter to others (*PH* I 101, 211, 213, II 63), (ii) it cannot be both at the same time, and (iii) the Pyrrhonist cannot decide whether it is sweet or bitter, then (iv) he feels compelled to suspend judgment about how honey really is. Given that the Pyrrhonist is committed to the LNC in its ontological dimension, he must also believe that it is impossible for opposite propositions to be true simultaneously and, hence, that it is not rational to hold inconsistent beliefs at the same time. One could hypothesize that part of the reason he suspends judgment is that he believes that it is not in fact possible for inconsistent beliefs to exist at the same time in his mind.

There seems to be unambiguous textual support for the view that the skeptic endorses the LNC. To begin with, in his discussion, in *Against the Ethicists*, of whether there is anything good or bad by nature, Sextus remarks:

> If, therefore, everything that appears good to someone is altogether good, then since pleasure appears good to Epicurus, bad to one of the Cynics, and indifferent to the Stoic, pleasure will be simultaneously good and bad and indifferent. But the same thing cannot be by nature contrary things (τὰ ἐναντία)—simultaneously good and bad and indifferent. (*AD* V 74)

To all appearances, in this passage Sextus is endorsing the ontological version of the LNC, since he excludes the possibility that the same thing may have contrary properties at the same time.

In the chapter of *PH* III devoted to discussing time, Sextus mentions the distinct positions about the definition and substance of time that have been adopted and remarks that "either all these positions are true, or all are false, or some are true and some false" (*PH* III 138). He then rules out each of these possibilities and concludes that "we will not be able to affirm anything about time" (*PH* III 140), i.e., we will have to suspend judgment. The reason for rejecting the first possibility is that most of the positions reviewed conflict (*PH* III 138). Sextus seems to endorse the logical version of the LNC when he says that the conflicting assertions about time "cannot all be true" (*PH* III 138).

In the exposition of the Second Mode of Aenesidemus, Sextus remarks that we cannot determine what things are by nature, but only report how they appear in relation to each of the differences among humans. The reason is that

> we will believe (πιστεύσομεν) either all humans or some of them. If all, we will be attempting the impossible and accepting the opposites (καὶ ἀδυνάτοις ἐπιχειρήσομεν καὶ τὰ ἀντικείμενα παραδεξόμεθα). But if some, let them say to whom it is necessary to assent. For the Platonist will say to Plato, the Epicurean to Epicurus, and the others analogously, and thus by their undecidable dispute (ἀνεπικρίτως στασιάζοντες) they will bring us around again to suspension of judgment. (*PH* I 88)

This text presents two roads that, in his search for truth, the skeptic finds blocked: assenting to all the conflicting positions and assenting to one of them (cf. *PH* III 33–36). It is because both roads are blocked that he is led to take a third, namely, suspending judgment. In this passage, we seem to find a reference to the doxastic version of the LNC, since Sextus says that it is impossible to believe all humans because they have conflicting opinions. Similarly, in the ethical section of the third book of *PH*, he tells us:

> If, then, the things that move by nature move everyone in the same way, whereas we are not all moved in the same way with respect to the so-called goods, nothing is good by nature. The reason is that it is not possible to believe either all the positions expounded above [to be true] (πάσαις ταῖς προεκκειμέναις στάτεσι πιστεύειν), because of their conflict, or any one of them. (*PH* III 182; see also *AD* II 333a.)

The reason the latter alternative is ruled out is that the person who says that one must believe that one of conflicting positions is true becomes a party to the dispute and, hence, cannot be taken as an impartial judge. As for the former alternative, it seems to be ruled out because it violates the doxastic version of the LNC. Indeed, as in the previous quoted passage, Sextus refers to the impossibility of believing that all the conflicting positions are true. Given both this impossibility and the

impossibility of believing that any one of those positions is true, suspension is the attitude the skeptic finds himself compelled to adopt.

The quotations could easily be multiplied, since in several other passages Sextus says that it is absurd (ἄτοπος) or impossible (ἀδύνατος, ἀμήχανος) for conflicting things to be equally real or true or credible (*AD* II 18, 25, 119), or for the same thing to be simultaneously true and false or real and unreal or existent and non-existent or credible and incredible or evident and non-evident (e.g., *PH* I 61, III 113–114, 129; *AD* I 67, II 36, 46, 52, 344; *AM* I 200). But the passages that have been briefly analyzed are sufficient evidence for the Pyrrhonist's apparent endorsement of the LNC in its ontological, logical, and doxastic dimensions and for the claim that his suspension rests on that endorsement. In fact, most interpreters implicitly or explicitly take the Pyrrhonist to be committed to the LNC.[3] In the next two sections, I will examine whether that is really the case.

5.4 The Skeptic's Suspension About the LNC

It is plain that the prospective Pyrrhonist endorses the LNC and that he suspends judgment partly because of that endorsement. However, his being doxastically committed to that law does not tell us anything about the scope of the full-fledged Pyrrhonist's skepticism. For it is possible that, after suspending judgment about a wide range of matters, the full-fledged Pyrrhonist realizes that he cannot actually exclude the possibility that the same thing might have opposite properties at the same time, and hence that opposite propositions might be true at the same time. He may also realize that he cannot discount the possibility that it might be rational and feasible to hold inconsistent beliefs at the same time. In fact, in several passages Sextus makes it clear that the Pyrrhonist does not endorse the LNC inasmuch as, by his own lights, the existence of a conflict of appearances is compatible with three possibilities among which he cannot decide.

The first possibility is that at most one of the conflicting appearances corresponds to how the object really is. This is in fact the stance ascribed to the skeptic by some interpreters when explaining why skepticism is not the same as relativism.[4] They claim that, whereas the skeptic assumes that x is really either F or G, but cannot decide which one it is, the relativist affirms that x is in itself neither F nor G, but that it is one or the other relative to a given person in certain circumstances.

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[3] For an explicit ascription of such a commitment to the skeptic, see Grenier (1957: 360, 364–365), Rossitto (1981), Burnyeat (1982: 24), Maia Neto (1995: xv), Striker (1996b: 121, 125), Harte and Lane (1999: 165 with n. 13), Włodarczyk (2000: 34), Polito (2004: 52), Long (2006: 54 n. 30), and Trowbridge (2006: 262 n. 4). Caujolle-Zaslawsky (1982: 375) maintains that the skeptic does not call into question the principles of logic.

[4] See, e.g., Annas and Barnes (1985: 97–98), Bénatouïl (1997: 232–233), and Pellegrin (1997: 552–553). Let me note as an aside that I take Pyrrhonism to be compatible with what I have elsewhere called "phenomenological relativism" (see Machuca, 2015).

The second possibility is that the same object has opposite properties, which is the position Sextus ascribes to Heraclitus and Protagoras. In the chapter of the first book of *PH* in which Sextus distinguishes Heracliteanism from skepticism, he points out that the difference between the two philosophies is clear because Heraclitus "makes dogmatic assertions about many non-evident matters" (*PH* I 210), whereas skeptics do not. Sextus is, however, forced to expand on their differences because

> Aenesidemus and his followers used to say that the skeptical approach is a road towards the philosophy of Heraclitus, because [saying] that contraries appear with respect to the same thing precedes [saying] that contraries are real with respect to the same thing (προηγεῖται τοῦ τἀναντία περὶ τὸ αὐτὸ ὑπάρχειν τὸ τἀναντία περὶ τὸ αὐτὸ φαίνεσθαι), and skeptics say that contraries appear with respect to the same thing, while Heracliteans go on from this also to [saying] that they are real [with respect to the same thing]. We say against them that it is not a dogma of the skeptics that contraries appear with respect to the same thing, but a fact (πρᾶγμα) that is observed (ὑποπίπτον) not only by the skeptics, but also by the other philosophers and all men. (*PH* I 210)

Sextus then explains that

> the skeptical approach not only does not ever help to the knowledge of the philosophy of Heraclitus, but is an obstacle to it, since the skeptic denounces all the things about which Heraclitus dogmatizes as being said rashly, thereby opposing the conflagration, opposing [the claim] that contraries are real with respect to the same thing, and with respect to each dogma of Heraclitus ridiculing the dogmatic rashness and, as I said before, uttering "I do not apprehend" and "I determine nothing," which is in conflict with the Heracliteans. (*PH* I 212)

The chapter under consideration is relevant to the thorny question of the so-called Heracliteanism of Aenesidemus. Although this issue is no doubt intriguing, it is beyond the scope of this book.[5] The important point for present purposes concerns both the reason why Sextus opposes the Aenesideman interpretation of the relation between Heracliteanism and skepticism, and the attitude he adopts towards Heraclitus's claim that contraries hold of one and the same thing (cf. *Met.* Γ 3 1005b24–25). Sextus opposes that interpretation because Heraclitus's claim is an assertion about a non-evident matter. Indeed, the skeptic notices the fact that contraries appear to hold of one and the same thing, but realizes that from this fact alone one cannot infer that contraries do hold of one and the same thing. Thus, he thinks that Heracliteans endorse the view that the same thing has contrary properties without having sufficient evidence in its favor, which means that he does not believe that the view is false but rather suspends judgment about whether it is true or false. This is clearly seen in the fact that, to each of the Heraclitean dogmas, the skeptic applies the phrases "I do not apprehend" and "I determine nothing," which express the attitude of suspension of judgment (see *PH* I 201 and 197, respectively). The chapter under consideration thus makes it clear that the skeptic does not endorse the LNC in its ontological dimension, since he does not know whether Heraclitus's position is

[5] For discussion of this issue, see Rist (1970), Hankinson (1998: 129–131), Bett (2000: 223–232), Brochard (2002: 284–301), Polito (2004), Pérez-Jean (2005), Bonazzi (2007), and Schofield (2007).

true or false. It also makes it clear that he is not committed to the logical version of the LNC, since he refrains from affirming that opposite propositions cannot be true at the same time. If this is so, then it is plain as well that the skeptic suspends judgment about whether it is rational to hold inconsistent beliefs at the same time.

Sextus also devotes a chapter of *PH* to discussing the differences between skepticism and Protagoras's position (*PH* I 216–219). There are several elements of Protagoreanism that distinguish it from Pyrrhonism:

> [Protagoras] says, indeed, that matter is in flux and that, given that it is in flux, additions continuously take place in lieu of the effluxions, and that the senses are rearranged and altered on account of the age and the other constitutions of the bodies. He also says that the reasons (τοὺς λόγους) of all things subsist (ὑποκεῖσθαι) in matter, so that matter, insofar as it itself is concerned, can be all the things that appear to all. Men grasp different things at different times, depending on their different conditions: someone in a natural state apprehends those things in matter that can appear to those in a natural state, someone in an unnatural state apprehends what can appear in an unnatural state. And further, depending on age, and according to whether we are sleeping or waking, and by virtue of each sort of condition, the same account holds. Therefore, according to him, man becomes the criterion of the things that are, for all things that appear to men also exist, and the things that appear to no men do not exist. We see, then, that he dogmatizes about matter being in flux and about the reasons of all things that appear subsisting in it, things that are non-evident and about which we suspend judgment. (*PH* I 217–219)

For present purposes, it does not matter whether this account of Protagoras's position is historically accurate or whether it is entirely compatible with the account found at *AD* I 60–64 in the course of the discussion of the criterion of truth. What does matter is Sextus's attitude towards the position he ascribes to Protagoras. Like the Heraclitean and the skeptic, Protagoras observes the conflict of appearances, since he points out that things appear differently to people by virtue of the various states in which they find themselves. Like the Heraclitean but unlike the skeptic, Protagoras goes beyond the realm of appearances, since he maintains that there is correspondence between what appears to a person by virtue of the state in which he finds himself and what is present in matter: anything that appears to someone corresponds to an objective feature of reality. Now, the beginning of the passage seems to suggest that the same thing possesses different properties only successively; that is to say, during its permanent change, each thing acquires different properties in parallel with the alterations experienced by the individuals who apprehend them. The rest of the passage, however, shows that according to the Protagorean position different properties coexist in the same thing. Indeed, given that the individual person is the criterion of truth, everything that appears to anyone is real, and it is clear that things appear differently to different persons at the same time by virtue of the different states in which they find themselves (cf. *Met.* Γ 4 1007b20–25; 5 1009a5–15). For instance, if a certain portion of honey appears at the same time sweet to a healthy person but bitter to a sick person, then one must infer that both appearances are equally true, i.e., that the very same portion of honey is both sweet and bitter. Thus, in the quoted passage, Sextus ascribes to Protagoras a position that is similar to that which he ascribes to Heraclitus. Just as with the Heraclitean view, Sextus does not oppose the Protagorean view because he believes it is false, but

because he finds it as persuasive as the other views on the conflict of appearances. He explicitly points out at the end of the quoted passage that the skeptic suspends judgment about whether that view is correct or not. Therefore, given that the skeptic neither affirms nor denies the truth of the Protagorean position, we must conclude that he does not endorse the ontological, logical, or normative doxastic versions of the LNC. In addition, since the skeptic is aware that both Heraclitus and Protagoras claim to believe that *x* is *F* and that it is not *F*, he is aware that, to all appearances, some people are in fact able to hold inconsistent beliefs at the same time. Both thinkers believe, e.g., that honey is simultaneously both sweet and bitter, and given that, unlike Aristotle (see *Met.* Γ 3 1005b23–26 in relation to Heraclitus), the skeptic has no *a priori* reason to question the sincerity of what they claim to believe, neither does he endorse the descriptive doxastic version of the LNC.

The third possibility that is compatible with the conflict of appearances is that, e.g., honey is neither sweet nor bitter, but appears to be one way or the other only by virtue of the diversity of species, individuals, or senses that perceive it or by virtue of some other factor. This kind of position is attributed to Democritus in the chapter of *PH* in which are expounded the differences between his philosophy and skepticism. Sextus remarks that the two philosophies have been thought to be similar because Democritus's theory

> seems to make use of the same material as we do. For from the fact that honey appears sweet to some but bitter to others, they say that Democritus infers that the same thing is neither sweet nor bitter, and for this reason utters the phrase "not more" (οὐ μᾶλλον), which is skeptical. The skeptics and the followers of Democritus, however, employ the phrase "not more" differently, since the latter uses the phrase in the sense that neither of the alternatives is the case (εἶναι), whereas we use it in the sense of not knowing whether any of the things that appear is both or neither (ἀγνοεῖν πότερον ἀμφότερα ἢ οὐθέτερόν τι ἔστι τῶν φαινομένων). Hence, with respect to this we differ. But the distinction becomes most evident when Democritus says "in reality atoms and void," since he says "in reality" instead of "in truth." And I regard it as superfluous to say that, when he says that atoms and void exist, he differs from us, even though he starts from the variation of the things that appear (τῆς ἀνωμαλίας τῶν φαινομένων). (*PH* I 213–214)

The alleged similarity between the Democritean and the skeptical philosophies is based on two elements: both start from the conflict of appearances and both use the expression οὐ μᾶλλον. However, from the variation of the things that appear Democritus takes a road that leads him to a dogmatic view, which he expresses by means of that expression. Democritus uses "not more" in its usual sense, namely, to indicate that neither of the conflicting appearances corresponds to what the object is really like. By contrast, the skeptic employs "not more" to convey his ignorance of whether both appearances are true or neither is—that is to say, the skeptical "not more" is a way of expressing the mental state of suspension. Taking also into account what Sextus says about the expression "not more" at *PH* I 188–191, one should say that this expression expresses the skeptic's ignorance of whether (i) only one of the conflicting appearances is true, or (ii) both are true, or (iii) neither is true. Hence, Sextus makes it clear that the Democritean view offers one possible account of the conflict of appearances that goes beyond what the skeptic has been able to

establish, since he has observed and described such a conflict but has so far been incapable of determining what things are really like.[6]

The reason the Pyrrhonist suspends judgment about which of the three views on the conflict of appearances is true is that they strike him as equipollent. Both philosophers and ordinary people, Sextus tells us at *PH* I 210–211, observe the conflict of appearances. Most of them adopt a dogmatic position in the face of this conflict, i.e., they make assertions that go beyond what appears. By contrast, the Pyrrhonist cannot determine which of the three conflicting views is correct because the mere existence of a conflict of appearances points to no specific state of affairs—i.e., it does not establish that only one of the conflicting appearances is true or that all are true or that none is true—and because he has not as yet found a criterion that would enable him to resolve the disagreement between the proponents of those three views. For this reason, he limits himself to describing the various ways things appear to him. We must therefore consider the Pyrrhonist's suspension as a fourth stance one may adopt in the face of a conflict of appearances.

One may hypothesize that, in addition to his inability to choose between the three views just referred to because they are, as it were, underdetermined by the mere conflict of appearances, another reason the Pyrrhonist suspends judgment about the truth of the LNC is the apparent equipollence of the arguments that can be put forward for and against that law. Against those who deny the LNC, the Pyrrhonist can make use of the Aristotelian arguments found in *Metaphysics* Γ. And against those who defend the LNC, he can, first, take Aristotle's claim that the endeavor to prove everything, including the LNC, leads to an infinite regress (*Met.* Γ 4 1006a8–9) as a recognition that the attempt to prove that law falls prey to the Agrippan mode of infinite regress (*PH* I 166). Unlike Aristotle, he would not regard this as a reason to accept the LNC as a first principle that as such does not require a proof. Rather, he would argue that being caught in an infinite regress represents a problem for the defender of the LNC. Second, with regard to the Aristotelian claims that the LNC does not depend on anything else to be known (*Met.* Γ 3 1005b11–17) and that it cannot be apprehended by demonstration (*Met.* Γ 6 1011a8–13), the Pyrrhonist would point out that they amount to an arbitrary assumption, that is, that they fall prey to the mode of hypothesis (*PH* I 168). Finally, Aristotle maintains that the LNC is the highest or ultimate principle of all demonstrations (*Met.* Γ 3 1005b32–33), which means that every proof of the LNC that is not refutative but intends to establish it directly necessarily presupposes it. The impossibility of offering a direct proof of the LNC without making use of it would not be taken by the Pyrrhonist as evidence that it is a first principle that we must endorse. Rather, he would emphasize that the defender of the LNC cannot prove this law directly without begging the question.

[6] In several passages, Sextus jointly mentions the three views that have been examined and explicitly remarks that the skeptic is unable to decide between them, which is of course to be understood in the sense that he suspends judgment about which one corresponds to the way things really are (see *PH* II 53; *AD* I 369, II 213–214, 354–355).

5.5 The Skeptic's Observance of the LNC

In *Metaphysics* Γ, Aristotle argues that, as soon as those who reject the LNC say something they take to be meaningful, they show that they are committed to that law (see *Met.* Γ 4 1006a21–31; cf. 7 1012a21–24, 8 1012b5–8). Indeed, if a word or a proposition could have opposite meanings at the same time, then what it intends to convey would be unclear—and if this happened with every word or proposition, then communication would be impossible. Hence, even those who deny the truth of the LNC presuppose it in order to make clear what they mean by such a denial—otherwise their words would be understood both the way they intend them and the opposite way. One could maintain that this argument may also be effectively used against the person who suspends judgment about the truth of the LNC, since once the Pyrrhonist utters an appearance-statement he takes to be meaningful, he shows that he is committed to that law.

The Pyrrhonist would respond that the argument in question does not establish that reality is such that the same thing cannot have opposite properties at the same time or that opposite propositions cannot both be true at the same time, but at most that people cannot help observing the LNC when uttering words or propositions they take to be meaningful. He would explain his own observance of the LNC when describing his philosophical stance and arguing against the dogmatists' views by saying that, as a matter of fact, he has so far been unable to communicate his thought and discuss with others without observing that law. He is therefore psychologically constrained to think and speak in accordance with the LNC, even though he can conceive of and express the possibility that this law may not correspond to the way things really are and, hence, the possibility that opposite propositions may both be true.[7]

By the Pyrrhonist's lights, then, Aristotle's argument at most shows that people observe what may be described as a psychological and a linguistic version of that law. Let us consider the former version first. The Pyrrhonist does not affirm that it is irrational or unfeasible for anyone to hold inconsistent beliefs at the same time. With respect to the normative doxastic version of the LNC, given that he cannot rule out the possibility that the same thing may have opposite properties at the same time and, hence, that opposite propositions may be true simultaneously, he does affirm that it is irrational to hold inconsistent beliefs at the same time. As for the descriptive doxastic version, it appears to him that certain people, such as Heraclitus and Protagoras, in fact hold inconsistent beliefs simultaneously. Hence, the Pyrrhonist does not endorse a view about what humans in general should or can believe. Nonetheless, he finds himself psychologically constrained to think in conformity with the LNC and to assent to it in the sense of acquiescing in it or yielding to it—in a way similar to that in which he assents to the appearances or affections that are forced on him (*PH* I 13, 19, 29, 193). The psychological version of the LNC that the Pyrrhonist feels compelled to observe could be formulated thus:

[7] Cf. McPherran (1987: 315, 317–318) and Nussbaum (1994: 308).

Psychological Version
Up to now I have, as a matter of psychological fact, been unable to assent to two or more conflicting appearances at the same time.

Note, first, that this version of the LNC applies to both doxastic and non-doxastic assent to appearances. With regard to the former, the Pyrrhonist does not doxastically assent to any one of the conflicting appearances bearing on the question whether *p* because they strike him as equal in epistemic persuasiveness. But even if he came to the conclusion that they are all true, he would be psychologically unable to doxastically assent to more than one of them. With the regard to the latter, he non-doxastically assents to one of those conflicting appearances when it strikes him as psychologically persuasive or as more so than the others. But at least so far, he has been unable to non-doxastically assent to two or more conflicting appearances at the same time.

Second, the reason I have introduced personal and temporal qualifiers in the formulation of the psychological version of the LNC is that they are constantly used by Sextus in his account of the sense in which the skeptical phrases must be understood (*PH* I 187–208). Such qualifiers convey the Pyrrhonist's distinctive caution that makes him limit the scope of his remarks to his own experience. The psychological version of the LNC is not a normative claim, but a merely descriptive one.

Third, the Pyrrhonist's observance of the psychological version of the LNC is part of what explains not only his reaction to first-order conflicts of appearances, but also his reaction to the second-order disagreement between those who affirm and those who deny the truth of the LNC. For the reason he suspends judgment when confronted with such a second-order disagreement is that he finds himself unable to decide between the two opposing views and to assent to both simultaneously.

Fourth, we saw in previous chapters that apparent things are the Pyrrhonist's criterion of action (*PH* I 21–22), that they induce his assent involuntarily (*PH* I 19), and that he follows the appearances non-doxastically (ἀδοξάστως) (*PH* I 23–24). That criterion is fourfold, one of its parts being "the guidance of nature," which refers to the fact that the Pyrrhonist is naturally capable of perceiving and thinking (*PH* I 24).[8] One may reasonably suppose that this natural capacity to think includes the observance of the psychological version of the LNC, to which he assents involuntarily and non-doxastically, i.e., without making any assertion about its truth (cf. McPherran, 1987: 318).[9]

As regards the linguistic version of the LNC observed by the skeptic, it can be interpreted as a linguistic rule that enables him to make himself understood and to understand others (cf. Stough, 1984: 156). This version could be formulated thus:

Linguistic Version
In order for me to have mutually intelligible communication within my linguistic community, I have so far been unable as a speaker to assign opposite meanings to every

[8] Similarly, according to Diogenes Laertius, the Pyrrhonists remark: "we agree that we see and recognize that we think, but we are ignorant of how we see or how we think" (DL IX 103).

[9] I have already examined the skeptic's use of his natural thinking capacity in Chaps. 3 and 4, and I will have more to say about it in Sect. 5.6 below.

> word at the same time, and as a hearer to interpret every word as having opposite meanings at the same time.

The skeptic's observance of this linguistic version of the LNC does not represent a doxastic commitment because it is an empirical report that merely describes a linguistic convention that makes communication possible among the members of his community, a convention that seems to derive ultimately from a psychological constraint. It does not therefore presuppose any view about the real nature of things or of our mind.

Aristotle argues that, by choosing one course of action over another, those who reject the LNC show that they believe that things are one way rather than another (*Met.* Γ 4 1008b12–27). Thus, even though the refusal to say something on the part of those who deny the truth of the LNC prevents them from betraying their endorsement of this law, their non-linguistic actions do reveal their conscious or unconscious commitment to it. The same argument could be directed against those who suspend judgment about the truth of the LNC. In reply, the Pyrrhonist would remark that he prefers one course of action to another not because he believes that things are one way rather than another, but simply because some appearances strike him as persuasive, or as more persuasive than others, from a merely psychological point of view, so that he is not at the same time both persuaded and unpersuaded by those appearances in such circumstances. He follows his appearances non-doxastically, i.e., without holding opinions about whether things are such as they appear. Still, there seems to be textual evidence that the Pyrrhonist is committed to what can be regarded as a practical version of the LNC. In the chapter of *Against the Ethicists* that examines whether it is possible to live happily if one believes that there are things good or bad by nature, Sextus points out:

> If, then, someone should assume that everything that is in any way pursued by anyone is by nature good, and everything that is avoided is by nature to be avoided, he will have a life that is unlivable, being compelled simultaneously to pursue and avoid the same thing—to pursue it insofar as it has been supposed by some a thing to be chosen, but to avoid it insofar as it has been deemed by others a thing to be avoided. (*AD* V 115)

Similarly, in a later chapter in which he discusses whether there is a skill (τέχνη) relating to life, Sextus tells us the following:

> The skill that is claimed to relate to life, and thanks to which they suppose that one is happy, is not a single skill but many and discordant ones, such as the one according to Epicurus, and the one according to the Stoics, and the one of the Peripatetics. Either, then, one must follow all of them alike or only one or none. And to follow them all is something impracticable owing to the conflict among them; for what this one commands as a thing to be chosen, that one forbids as a thing to be avoided, and it is not possible to pursue and avoid the same thing simultaneously. (*AD* V 173–174)

These passages refer to what can be interpreted as a practical version of the LNC to which the Pyrrhonist is committed:

> *Practical Version*
> It is impossible to perform opposite (either contradictory or contrary) actions at the same time.

I think, however, that the Pyrrhonist would refrain from endorsing this version of the LNC, for it is a universal claim about what kind of actions cannot be simultaneously performed, a claim that seems to be based on an ontological view. For example, the reason one cannot simultaneously move and stay still is that reality is such that these opposite actions cannot be performed at the same time. The Pyrrhonist might remark that, even if one could not simultaneously move and stay still, if Carla were a woman and not a woman at the same time and in the same respect, then were one to dance tango with her, one would simultaneously dance with a woman and not dance with a woman. Or even if one could not simultaneously eat and not eat, if one and the same piece of matter were honey and not honey at the same time and in the same respect, then were one to eat it, one would at once eat honey and not eat honey. A present-day Pyrrhonist would also point out that he cannot discount the possibility that, if there is indeed an omnipotent God, as traditional Western theism claims, then such a being is able to perform opposite actions at the same time or to make it possible for us to do so—including simultaneously being at rest and moving.[10] In any case, I think the Pyrrhonist would be more comfortable with the following qualified practical version of the LNC:

> *Qualified Practical Version*
> So far, I have not been able to perform opposite actions at the same time and I have not observed others perform opposite actions at the same time.

This version of the LNC is an empirical report rather than an assertion to the effect that reality is such that one cannot perform opposite actions at the same time: the Pyrrhonist limits himself to reporting what he has experienced or observed up till now.

At this point, two caveats are in order. First, in referring to the Pyrrhonist's observance of the psychological and linguistic versions of the LNC, I do not mean to imply that he denies that the LNC is a true universal law. For, according to my interpretation, he does not assert that the LNC is to be explained entirely in terms of a contingent psychological fact or a linguistic convention. Rather, what I have tried to show is that the fact that the Pyrrhonist makes use of certain logical principles does not entail that he is doxastically committed to those principles, since that fact may be explained as resulting from the way he is psychologically hardwired or from a convention followed by the members of his linguistic community. But this is not incompatible with the LNC being a true universal law: perhaps we think and speak in accordance with the LNC because it is a logical and ontological principle that is universally true. Second, the Pyrrhonist would not present the versions of the LNC observed by him as versions of the *law* or *principle* of non-contradiction. The reason is simply that he does not assert that those versions are objectively and universally true, but merely presents them as descriptive reports of his own experiences. The nature and status of these phenomenological reports are the same as those of the

[10] Cf. Descartes (*Letter to Mesland*, 2 May 1644, AT IV 118–119) and Goldstick (1990), both of whom maintain that God could make contradictories be true together.

skeptical phrases. Hence, I speak of the Pyrrhonist's observance of certain versions of the law or principle of non-contradiction only as a matter of convenience.

If the Pyrrhonist suspends judgment about whether opposite properties can coexist in the same thing, about whether opposite propositions can be true simultaneously, about whether inconsistent beliefs should or may be held at the same time, and about whether it is possible to perform opposite actions simultaneously, how are we to explain the passages that seem to unequivocally show that he is doxastically committed to the dogmatic versions of the LNC? Why does Sextus say in those passages that it is impossible to violate the LNC in its ontological, logical, doxastic, and unqualified practical versions? One possible answer is of course that he is just inconsistent. Another is that those passages must be interpreted in light of the Pyrrhonist's *ad hominem* argumentation (cf. McPherran, 1987: 318; 1990: 140 n. 7). Even though he does not accept the dogmatic versions of the LNC *in propria persona*, he employs them in his argumentative therapy because most of his dogmatic patients are doxastically committed to them.

To conclude the present section, let me say something about the Pyrrhonist's attitude towards the logical validity of his arguments. It might be thought that, even though he does not endorse the premises and conclusions of his arguments, he is nonetheless committed to the validity of the inferences he draws. This explains, for example, why he thinks that the dogmatists are logically forced to accept the conclusions of his *ad hominem* arguments given their explicit or implicit acceptance of their premises. In my view, however, the reason why the Pyrrhonist draws certain inferences in his *ad hominem* arguments—and his dialectical arguments more generally—is that they are accepted by his dogmatic rivals. It will be objected that it is hard to believe that, in his mundane deliberations and in his philosophical reflections, the Pyrrhonist does not make use of certain rules of inference. He could reply that, despite his skepticism about what the dogmatists call "logic," his thinking automatically or involuntarily conforms to rules of inference that humans may be hardwired to observe, that have been inculcated in him by the education and professional training he received, and that have turned out to work in practical contexts. He could say that his natural thinking capacity includes the non-committal use of inference rules in addition to the non-doxastic observance of certain versions of the LNC. In sum, the Pyrrhonist's use of such rules of inference as *modus ponens* and *modus tollens* can be explained in part as a dialectical maneuver and in part as a psychological constraint, in much the same way as his use of the LNC.[11]

[11] I therefore think that it is a mistake to claim that the skeptic has "une foi profonde en l'efficacité de l'argumentation ainsi qu'en la force du syllogisme en tant que moyen d'apodicticité" (Pentzopoulou-Valalas, 1994: 240).

5.6 Suspension as a Psychological Reaction

What about the mental state of suspension? Does the Pyrrhonist suspend judgment about all the matters he has so far investigated because he believes that one is rationally required to do so when conflicting arguments strike one as equally strong? It might be argued that the Pyrrhonist is doxastically committed to the following requirement of rationality:

> *Rationally Required Suspension*
> It is rationally required to suspend judgment in the face of a disagreement that one is unable to resolve because of the apparent equipollence of the conflicting arguments.

This may seem to be the natural reading of the Sextan texts. It is in fact endorsed not only by several specialists in ancient Pyrrhonism, but also by some contemporary epistemologists with a certain familiarity with those texts. For instance, when briefly referring to Sextus's mode from disagreement, Thomas Kelly claims that the Pyrrhonian modes are "designed to rationally induce suspension of judgment" (2005: 169), and he seems to think that the Pyrrhonist himself deems suspension to be rationally grounded. This interpretation is reasonable because, when a person believes, disbelieves, or withholds judgment on a given proposition, he is typically taken to be committed to regarding the attitude he adopts as rationally appropriate (e.g., Turri, 2012: 361). Let us consider the following argument:

1. Rationality requires one to suspend judgment about whether *p* if one finds the arguments for and against *p* equally strong.
2. I find the arguments for and against *p* equally strong.
3. Therefore, I am rationally required to suspend judgment about whether *p*.

If the Pyrrhonist suspended judgment on the various subjects into which he has inquired by applying this argument and if he deemed the argument to be sound, then he would endorse the requirement of rationality formulated in premise 1. However, this interpretation is to be rejected because Sextus conceives of ἐποχή as the enforced psychological effect of being confronted with arguments that appear equipollent to one. Indeed, he remarks that the skeptical approach is called "'suspensive' because of the affection (πάθους) that comes about in the inquirer after the investigation" (*PH* I 7). And when explaining the meaning of 'non-assertion' (ἀφασία), which is another word with which Sextus refers to the state of suspension, he points out that "non-assertion is an affection of ours (πάθος ἡμέτερον) because of which we neither posit nor reject anything" (*PH* I 192). As already noted in Chap. 2, a πάθος is a physical or a psychological state in which a person or a thing is as a result of being affected by an agent in the broad sense of this term. To the extent that it is a πάθος, suspension is a mental state in which the Pyrrhonist finds himself because of his own mental constitution, by virtue of which he cannot avoid withholding his assent whenever conflicting appearances strike him as

equipollent.[12] The Pyrrhonist is affected by these appearances in such a way that he ends up, as a matter of psychological fact, in a suspensive or agnostic state of mind. Suspension is therefore something that imposes itself upon him, and so something he accepts passively, in much the same way in which he accepts such affections as the feelings of hunger and thirst, and those of coldness and heat (*PH* I 13, 19).

It is also worth noting that Sextus remarks that the phrase "I suspend judgment" makes it clear that "objects appear to us equal as regards credibility and lack of credibility. Whether they are equal, we do not affirm: we say what appears to us about them, when they make an impression on us (ὅτε ἡμῖν ὑποπίπτει)" (*PH* I 196). Similarly, when explaining the notion of non-assertion, Sextus observes that "it is clear that we do not use 'non-assertion' to mean that objects are in their nature such as to move us necessarily to non-assertion, but rather to make it clear that now, when we are uttering it, we are affected (πεπόνθαμεν) in this way with respect to these matters that are being investigated" (*PH* I 193). Thus, the skeptic does not affirm that there is an objective foundation for his suspension—that the reasons for and against *p* are really equipollent and that suspension is the objectively correct response to such equipollence—but merely remarks that he suspends judgment because he is currently appeared to or affected in a certain way.

Just as the skeptic does not affirm that everyone (including Heraclitus and Protagoras) observes the psychological version of the LNC, so too does he refrain from affirming that every person who considers the skeptical arguments is psychologically affected in such a way that he finds himself compelled to suspend judgment. For most people continue to hold beliefs about how things really are even after having been subjected to the skeptical argumentative treatment. The Pyrrhonist would describe his state of mind using personal and temporal qualifiers:

> *Psychologically Constrained Suspension*
> Up to now, I have found myself psychologically constrained to suspend judgment in the face of a disagreement whenever the conflicting arguments have appeared equipollent to me.

Even though the Pyrrhonist thinks that, at least for the time being, he cannot offer a sound argument that establishes that he is rationally required to suspend judgment whenever he is confronted with a disagreement between seemingly equipollent positions, he feels compelled to suspend judgment. Consequently, we need to distinguish between rational necessity and psychological constraint. Note that, in his exposition of the Ten and the Five Modes of suspension, Sextus usually points out that, because of what has been argued, it is necessary (δεῖ, ἀνάγκη, ἀναγκαῖον) to suspend judgment or that we are compelled (ἀναγκάζεσθαι) to do so (*PH* I 61, 78, 89, 121, 128–129, 163, 170, 175, 177). Although one could construe this necessity

[12] This interpretation of the relation between suspension and equipollence is generally accepted by scholars. See, e.g., McPherran (1987: 318–320; 1990: 140 n. 6), Barnes (1990: 2610–2611), Hankinson (1994: 49 n. 15; 1998: 30, 298), Annas (1998: 196), Palmer (2000: 372 n. 22), Striker (2004: 16), and Grgić (2006: 142). Annas and Barnes (1985: 49) and Barnes (2000: xxi) claim that the texts suggest that the relation may also be interpreted as a requirement of rationality. As we will see below, Perin (2010) maintains that the relation must be understood that way, as does Lammenranta (2008, 2011).

as rational, it is also possible to interpret it as merely psychological, i.e., as independent of whether the claim that one must suspend judgment in certain circumstances is the conclusion of a sound argument. But even if we interpret the necessity as rational, it is possible to argue that, given the dialectical character of skeptical argumentation, in the above passages and in those in which Sextus seems to present suspension as the conclusion of an argument (*PH* I 35–36, 99, 123, 135, 140, 144), what he is saying is that the dogmatists are compelled to suspend judgment given the rational requirements they themselves claim to endorse.

I would now like to consider in some detail Casey Perin's rival interpretation of Pyrrhonian ἐποχή. He argues that the kind of necessity Sextus has in mind when saying that the Pyrrhonist is compelled to suspend judgment in the face of a disagreement he cannot resolve is primarily rational inasmuch as it is mainly the result of the aim of satisfying certain requirements of rationality (2010: chap. 2). The reason for having the aim of satisfying those requirements is that such an aim is part of what it is to be engaged in the search for truth, for given that the Pyrrhonist aims to discover the truth, he also aims to satisfy the rational requirements that govern the search for truth. A person can be regarded as aiming to discover the truth provided that he aims to form the belief that *p* if and only if there is a reason, in the form of evidence of the truth of *p*, to believe *p* (2010: 55). Perin calls the rational necessity in question "hypothetical": the Pyrrhonist must suspend judgment *if* he is to satisfy, as he aims to do, the demands of reason, i.e., certain basic rational requirements (2010: 4, 32, 38). Perin thus opposes those who, like myself, claim that the necessity in question is only or merely causal: its appearing to the Pyrrhonist that he has no reason to believe either *p* or its negation causes him to suspend judgment; he is thus passive with respect to a state of mind that is forced on him.

Perin correctly claims that the skeptic's dogmatic rival is committed to the following rational requirement:

(SJ) Rationality requires one to suspend judgement about whether *p* if one believes there is no reason to believe either *p* or its negation. (2010: 40)

But in the case of the skeptic, given that he has no beliefs—more precisely, no beliefs about how things are—and hence no beliefs about the reasons for a given belief, the rational requirement he aims to satisfy is, according to Perin, the following:

(SJ*) Rationality requires one to suspend judgement about whether *p* if it appears to one that there is no reason to believe either *p* or its negation. (2010: 43)

Thus formulated, this requirement cannot be accepted by the skeptic for the same reason Perin claims that (SJ) is not the requirement the skeptic aims to satisfy. For (SJ*) itself can be interpreted as a belief the skeptic holds and, if so, then, despite the view Perin (2010: chap. 3) defends, the skeptic does have at least one belief that

is not about his own appearances.[13] For he believes that, when one is confronted with opposing claims about a given matter that appear equipollent to one, one is rationally required to suspend judgment on that matter. If Perin does not think that the skeptic holds such a belief, he should have formulated the requirement that, in his view, the skeptic aims to satisfy in the following way:

(SJ**) It appears to me that rationality requires one to suspend judgment about whether *p* if it appears to one that there is no reason to believe either *p* or its negation.

But adopting this formulation would pose a problem for Perin's interpretation insofar as it does not seem to have any normative force—which may precisely be the reason why he does not use (SJ**). For the skeptic is just describing the way he is appeared to, not making an assertion about what any rational being ought to do in certain circumstances. This is precisely how Sextus tells us that the skeptical phrases are to be understood (*PH* I 187–208). They express the various ways the skeptic has so far been affected, or appeared to, in his investigation of the dogmatists' views. They are not assertions that purport to state what is, or should be, the case. I therefore favor the interpretation according to which the skeptic merely reports that, when exercising his natural capacity to think in his philosophical inquiries, he finds himself compelled to suspend judgment about the truth of the claims and the soundness of the arguments under examination. His suspension is indeed the result of a use of reason, but this use is not normative because he is not committed to the truth of what the dogmatists describe as the requirements of rationality and, hence, does not claim that we ought to suspend judgment. In his road to Pyrrhonism, the prospective skeptic first suspends judgment about a number of matters because of his commitment to certain rational requirements, but once he turns into a full-blown skeptic and suspends judgment even about those requirements, his suspension is nothing but a psychological state forced on him. Thus, the fact that the full-blown skeptic's suspension was first induced by that past commitment does not mean that at present the maintenance of his suspension is to be explained by his endorsement of certain rational requirements he aims to satisfy. One should bear in mind that the fact that the full-blown skeptic finds himself having and using the capacity to think and the fact that his thinking operates a certain way do not entail that he aims to satisfy the demands of reason as something to which he is doxastically committed. Those rational requirements continue to exert some sort of psychological influence on the full-blown skeptic because of the way he is evolutionarily hardwired or because of the way he is conditioned by his past education and philosophical training, but this does not mean that he accepts them *in propria persona*.[14]

[13] I will address the question of whether the Pyrrhonist has beliefs about the way he is appeared to in the Appendix to Chap. 8.

[14] Markus Lammenranta contends that the normative interpretation of why the Pyrrhonist suspends judgment in the face of an unresolvable disagreement is to be preferred because the psychological interpretation does not give rise to a serious skeptical problem (2008: 14–17, 29–30; 2011: 204 n. 2, 205–207). However, by distinguishing the Pyrrhonist's suspension from the dogmatist's, one can

What about Perin's claim that the Pyrrhonist has the aim of satisfying certain rational requirements because doing so is part of what it is to be engaged in the search for truth? As I argued in Chap. 2, in his philosophical investigations the Pyrrhonist makes a non-committal use of whatever tools he has at his disposal, including the rational requirements endorsed by his dogmatic rivals. He can do so because he does not reject them but only suspends judgment about their truth, and hence does not exclude the possibility that those requirements will turn out to be correct and will enable him to discover that there are positive or negative answers to the questions he investigates. Of course, neither does he exclude the opposite possibility. If either possibility became actual, his investigation would come to an end, but, in the meantime, he continues to critically employ all the logical and epistemological tools he is aware of and is willing to employ any new ones he might encounter. We can imagine the skeptic saying to himself: "Most dogmatists claim that, by using these various tools, they have discovered the truth about the matters into which I inquire, while others claim that, by using them, they have come to realize that the truth about those matters cannot be apprehended. So, I will try them in my own inquiries and see where they lead me." Up till now, the results of his inquiries have been (i) the observation of widespread and entrenched disagreements that he has been unable to resolve using the dogmatists' own rational requirements, (ii) the realization that, when the application of those requirements is pushed to its furthest limits, one ends up calling into question their truth,[15] and (iii) the experience of suspension as a state or condition forced on him.

5.7 The Skeptic's Use of Reason

Do the considerations of the preceding section entail that Pyrrhonian suspension is not rational? I will examine in detail what it means to say that a person or an attitude is rational in Chap. 10 by having recourse to contemporary accounts of rationality. For now, let me remark that there is a sense in which the Pyrrhonist's suspension is clearly rational: suspension about whether *p* is a response that is triggered after the careful consideration of arguments pro and con *p*. Suspension thus presupposes the use of the faculty of reason, even if such a use is a non-committal and detached one.

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retain the psychological interpretation of the former while preserving the skeptical problem faced by the latter. For no matter how the Pyrrhonist describes his own suspension, the skeptical problem arises for the dogmatist because he is required to suspend judgment by the rational norms that he himself endorses.

[15] The Five Modes of Agrippa, for example, can be applied to the requirements on epistemic justification underlying them. Indeed, Sextus remarks that "it is possible to refer every matter of investigation to those modes" (*PH* I 169) and one may assume that those requirements could be a matter of investigation for the Pyrrhonist. They would then be self-defeating, which would be unwelcome to the dogmatists who endorse them. The Pyrrhonist might view this as a possible indication of the self-destructive nature of reason: when driven to its limits, reason seems to undercut itself.

It is this use of reason on which I would like to focus in the remainder of this chapter.[16]

One of the strongest and most oft-repeated arguments directed against ancient skepticism—in both its Academic and Pyrrhonian versions—is the inactivity (ἀπραξία) objection. According to it, both universal ἀκαταληψία (the denial of the possibility of all knowledge) and universal ἐποχή (suspension of all judgment) are incompatible either with action *tout court* or with certain types of action—moral action, prudential action, or rational action (see Machuca, 2019). Several interpreters of Pyrrhonism accept the version of the objection according to which the Pyrrhonist's behavior is not that of a rational being. By my lights, part of the reason for their view is that they take the Pyrrhonist either to adopt an anti-rationalist stance or to make an extremely limited use of reason. It is nonetheless a mistake to regard the Pyrrhonist's life as devoid of an extensive use of reason, even though he suspends judgment about its epistemic value, i.e., about whether reason can enable us to discover the truth (if any there is) about the matters under investigation. As we saw above and in previous chapters, Sextus devotes a chapter of the first book of *PH* to explaining the skeptic's criterion of action. That chapter can be taken as Sextus's reply to the inactivity objection inasmuch as therein he points out that, "attending to the things that appear, we live without opinions in accordance with the everyday observance, because we cannot be utterly inactive" (*PH* I 23). One of the aspects of this observance is "the guidance of nature," which refers to the fact that "we are naturally capable of perceiving and thinking (φυσικῶς αἰσθητικοὶ καὶ νοητικοί ἐσμεν)" (*PH* I 24). If we take the notion of nature (φύσις) to refer to that which is inescapable or inevitable,[17] then we should say that the Pyrrhonist cannot help having perceptions and thoughts, although he suspends judgment about whether their contents correspond to how things really are. As noted in Chap. 3, it seems clear that among his intellectual appearances one must include the various ways arguments phenomenologically strike him and that there is a use of arguments that does not exceed the realm of his appearances. This is confirmed by the chapter of the first book of *PH* that examines whether the Pyrrhonist belongs to a sect or school:

> But if one says that a school is the approach that follows a certain rationale in accordance with what appears (τὴν λόγῳ τινὶ κατὰ τὸ φαινόμενον ἀκολουθουσᾶν ἀγωγήν), this argument showing how it is possible to seem[18] to live correctly […] and extending to the ability to suspend judgment, we say that he belongs to a school. For we follow an argument in accordance with what appears that shows us a life in conformity with traditional customs, laws, ways of life, and [our] own affections. (*PH* I 17)

The Pyrrhonist makes a practical use of λόγος that consists in employing it to conduct his life within the limits of his appearances (cf. Stough, 1984: 145–147). One may suppose that this practical use of reason is in the final analysis grounded not

[16] I will have more to say about suspension in Chap. 9 in connection with the disagreeing about disagreement argument. I further examine Pyrrhonian suspension in Machuca (2021).

[17] See McPherran (1989: 164) and Annas (1993: 209, 212).

[18] I do not follow Mutschmann in the deleting δοκεῖν, for I think it reflects the characteristically skeptical caution.

only on being equipped with a rational faculty but also on being constrained to exercise it. The Pyrrhonist's use of reason is therefore inescapable—insofar as he experiences himself as a being that is naturally capable of thinking—and pragmatic—insofar as, despite having so far been unable to discover the truth about the matters he has investigated, using reason enables him to get by in daily life by making decisions and communicating with others. I therefore agree with Perin (2010: 57 n. 40, 114) that the skeptic does not renounce reason as a guide to life, provided this is not interpreted as an epistemic and normative guide, but rather as a pragmatic one under whose guidance he feels compelled to be. The skeptic does recognize that reason requires him to suspend judgment in certain circumstances, as Perin (2010: 116) points out, but he does so passively because he finds himself compelled to do so; there is no voluntary and doxastic commitment to the demands of reason on his part.[19] The skeptic is therefore doxastically detached from his suspension of judgment as a response that is triggered by his use of his rational capacity. He takes a step back from his own reason insofar as he refrains from doxastically assenting to the conclusions of his arguments or from affirming the correctness of his conceptual analyses and distinctions. By making a non-committal use of reason, the skeptic is able to remain at some distance from the results of such a use, while at the same time recognizing that he experiences himself as a thinking being.[20]

One might suppose that the Pyrrhonist's mental life is wholly passive: he limits himself to observing, like an onlooker, the thoughts and reactions he finds himself with by virtue of being endowed with reason. It should nonetheless be clear that, even though there is an undeniable degree of passivity, the Pyrrhonist also makes an active use of reason that includes, for example, the analysis of the definitions that dogmatists give of certain notions, the examination of the internal coherence of philosophical doctrines, and the evaluation and production of arguments. In fact, not only are Sextus's extant writings packed with arguments, and not only does skeptical investigation consist in the examination, the refutation, and the construction of arguments, but suspension itself is the result of the scrutiny of arguments that strike the Pyrrhonist as equally strong. In this regard, note that, in the passage quoted above, Sextus tells us that the same use of reason that enables the Pyrrhonist to conduct his life in accordance with the appearances includes the ability to suspend judgment. I therefore think that, both in his own philosophical inquiries and in his daily life, the Pyrrhonist makes an active use of reason that is not merely pragmatic but also theoretical or speculative.[21] There is not so much a complete passivity in the Pyrrhonist's mental life as a complete withholding of assent, and hence a lack of

[19] *Pace* Hankinson (2020: 86), the skeptic can allow himself to be subject to rational compulsion inasmuch as he detaches himself from such compulsion by refraining from endorsing the requirements of rationality.

[20] A somewhat similar interpretation of the skeptic's use of reason is proposed by McPherran (1989: 163, 169–170).

[21] *Pace* Striker (2001: 119 n. 7; 2010: 205).

commitment to the results of the exercise of his rational capacity.[22] The active and passive aspects of his mental life are closely intertwined: the Pyrrhonist notices that he is endowed with reason and that, *qua* thinking being, he cannot help making not only a pragmatic use of that faculty, but also a theoretical use that up till now has resulted in a suspensive attitude that he refrains from endorsing as epistemically justified. The fact that suspension is a mental state that imposes itself on the Pyrrhonist owing to the way he is hardwired *qua* thinking being, and not the result of his commitment to a rational requirement, does not therefore mean that he does not, or could not, avail himself of his rational capacity. We should bear in mind that he does not exclude the possibility that he will eventually discover the truth about the matters under investigation by using that capacity.

The Pyrrhonist employs his rational faculty simply because that is the way he functions. He does not need a reason for doing so, much less a reason he regards as objective or normative. We can apply here a point made by Joseph Raz. He maintains that there are two mistakes that explain why some authors focus on reasons to be rational, the first being that "they fail to notice that we need no reasons to function rationally, just as we need no reason to hear sounds in our vicinity. So long as we are conscious our powers of hearing and our rational powers are engaged, though not always successfully" (2011: 95, cf. 99). A similar point is made more eloquently by Niko Kolodny in personal communication with Raz:

> True, my believing that 2 + 2 = 4, knowing what I know, is not (i) under my voluntary control. Nevertheless, my believing it can be (ii) the direct upshot of deliberation, of reflection on reasons (and this amounts to a kind of control over my beliefs, …). By contrast, not even the latter is true of the *functioning of my rational powers as a whole*. There is no question of deliberating, "Shall I function rationally?" and then directly proceeding, on the basis of an affirmative or negative answer, to continue functioning rationally, or to cease to. I could not *follow* such a reason […]. (Cited in Raz, 2011: 95 n. 20).

Just as with the exercise of his perceptual powers, the Pyrrhonist's exercise of his rational powers is not to be accounted for by reasons to which he responds appropriately. The possession of a rational faculty and its specific functioning is something he finds himself with, something that imposes itself on him.

Sextus's remark that the Pyrrhonist is naturally capable of thinking can then be interpreted in the sense that he experiences himself as equipped with a rational faculty, as constrained to make use of it, and as conditioned to think and respond in specific ways. The manner in which his thinking operates seems to be shaped not only by his mental constitution, but also by the education he received, the cultural context in which he was brought up, and his professional training—in philosophy and medicine in Sextus's case. Even though the Pyrrhonist suspends judgment about the truth of logical principles such as the LNC, the validity of inference rules such as *modus ponens* and *modus tollens*, and the truth of the requirements on justification underlying the Agrippan modes, his suspension neither affects the way he

[22] Even though Morrison (1990: 213–214) recognizes the Pyrrhonist's use of reason and argument in both everyday life and philosophical investigation, he accepts the view that the Pyrrhonist's mental life is entirely passive.

is naturally hardwired nor entirely removes the influence of circumstantial factors that shape the various ways things appear to him. In addition, if the Pyrrhonist wants to keep engaged in any kind of investigation, any type of conversation, any sort of human activity, then he cannot but use the cognitive capacities with which he finds himself equipped and follow the way he is intellectually appeared to. Even though he is doxastically detached from the results of his use of reason, he does not abandon its use, seek to destroy trust in it, or intend to provoke its paralysis (*pace* Burnyeat, 1997: 28, 46). For he does make an active use of reason in both his everyday life and his philosophical inquiries, and since he does not affirm that his rational capacity is unreliable or that his intellectual appearances are false, he cannot rule out the possibility that such a use of reason will enable him to discover the truth—if any there is—about the matters into which he inquires.

Is the Pyrrhonist an anti-rationalist? The answer depends on how one defines anti-rationalism. If by it one understands the lack of commitment to the requirements of rationality, then he is an anti-rationalist. But if by anti-rationalism one understands the firm rejection of those requirements, then he is certainly not an anti-rationalist. As far as I can see, it is this latter sense that one has in mind when speaking of anti-rationalism and, hence, when saying that the Pyrrhonist adopts this position.[23] The reason one cannot portray him as an anti-rationalist in this strong sense is simply that he does not deny the truth of the requirements of rationality, but rather suspends judgment on the matter. This suspensive attitude does not prevent him from making a use of reason that is both pragmatic and speculative—albeit non-committal and non-normative—and that is confined to the realm of his own appearances. The Pyrrhonist does observe the so-called requirements of rationality, but we should bear in mind that the fact that one is built to follow certain requirements does not entail that one takes these requirements to be true or that one believes that one ought to conform to them. The observance of a rule does not necessarily entail doxastic commitment, since it may consist in simple obedience. For this reason, I do not think that the Pyrrhonist is a rationalist either.[24] When applied to Pyrrhonism, the distinction between rationalism and anti-rationalism is not exhaustive. If I had to describe his stance on reason and rational requirements, I would say that it is a *deflationary rationalism*: he makes an extensive use of reason and observes rational requirements, while at the same time refraining from making any claims about the epistemic value of reason or about the truth of the requirements of rationality. You may object that, in speaking of deflationary rationalism, I am conceding that, applied to Pyrrhonism, the distinction between rationalism and anti-rationalism is after all exhaustive and that the Pyrrhonist is in the final analysis a rationalist. In reply, let me point out that I suspect that most philosophers would be reluctant to characterize the Pyrrhonist's stance as I have depicted it as a genuine form of rationalism given the absence of any kind of belief or doxastic commitment.

[23] See especially Striker (2001: 120, 122, 124–125) for the view that the Pyrrhonist is an anti-rationalist. Cf. Striker (1996a: 113; 2010: 204–206) and Marchand (2019: 260, 280).

[24] Grenier (1957) portrays the Pyrrhonist as adopting a strong rationalist stance, and Pentzopoulou-Valalas (1994) claims that he is a "(crypto-)rationalist."

5.8 Conclusion

Let us take stock. First, despite what some think, the skeptic's observance of the LNC is not to be understood as a doxastic commitment to the ontological, logical, doxastic, and unqualified practical versions of this law. Rather, it is based upon (i) a psychological constraint, (ii) a linguistic convention shared by the members of his community, and (iii) a practical unfeasibility. This is why I have argued that, when the skeptic makes use of the dogmatic versions of the LNC, he does so merely as a dialectical maneuver in order to persuade his dogmatic patients and induce them to suspend judgment. Second, with respect to the arguments of which he avails himself in his inquiries, the Pyrrhonist suspends judgment not only about the truth of their premises and conclusions but also about the validity of their logical forms. Third, he does not believe that he should suspend judgment because that is the conclusion of an argument he deems sound, which means that he does not endorse the requirement of rationality according to which one should suspend judgment whenever one is confronted with conflicting arguments that strike one as equipollent. Rather, suspension is a compulsory response that is triggered in the Pyrrhonist because of his mental constitution or the way he is hardwired. Fourth, he experiences himself as a thinking being, and as such makes an extensive practical and theoretical use of reason, which is nonetheless non-committal and non-normative. Consequently, he is neither a rationalist nor an anti-rationalist; his stance can perhaps be best described as a deflationary rationalism.

Here ends my exploration of some of the central aspects of Sextan Pyrrhonism. In the second part of the book, I will approach certain contemporary debates on disagreement, self-knowledge, and rationality from a neo-Pyrrhonian perspective with the aim of showing that Pyrrhonian skepticism might still be a live philosophical option.

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Part II
Pyrrhonism Present

Chapter 6
The Epistemology of Disagreement

Abstract In this chapter, I take a neo-Pyrrhonian approach to the current epistemological debate between conciliationists and steadfasters about how one ought to rationally respond to peer disagreement. After offering an overview of this debate, I argue that both parties make contentious assumptions. I then examine whether, in the face of peer disagreement, one can rationally hold one's ground by appealing either to the alleged fact that one has adequately responded to the first-order evidence bearing on the matter at hand or to the ineliminability of the first-person perspective and the self-trust that comes with it.

Keywords Conciliationism · Epistemic peer · Evidence · Factualism · First-person perspective · Self-trust · Steadfastness

6.1 Introduction

Disagreement is a pervasive phenomenon of human life. Not only do people constantly disagree with each other, but one even disagrees with oneself when one abandons the beliefs of one's past self or when one has inconsistent beliefs. Some disagreements are important from a merely theoretical perspective inasmuch as they have no bearing on our practical decisions. But there are also disputes with practical implications whose resolution depends on long and heated theoretical discussions—disputes about war, torture, abortion, euthanasia, capital punishment, drug legalization, or genetic enhancement. The parties to such disputes engage in the practice of giving and asking for reasons with the aim of either convincing their rivals or else being convinced by them, an aim that most of the time is not achieved, and never achieved easily. It is possible to *de facto* resolve a disagreement of this kind even though one has not been able to determine which of the parties, if any, is rationally to be preferred to the others—which means that the disagreement has not been resolved strictly speaking. When this happens, one of the sides has in fact been chosen or a given course of action will in fact be followed. This kind of resolution may be due to the influence or power of one of the contending parties. But it may also be due to the fact that one sometimes needs to flip a coin to choose a given

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course of action for the simple reason that one is dealing with urgent and vital matters. However, given what is at stake in some real-life situations, one wants to base one's decisions on knowledge or justified belief: one wants to know or justifiably believe that one of the disagreeing parties, if any, is right because one thinks that the practical cost of error is high. Disagreement is thus of both epistemic and practical significance.

Sextus constantly refers to both actual and possible disagreements in distinct areas of philosophy and ordinary life. In his treatment of these disagreements, he tells us that the Pyrrhonist is unable to prefer any one of the conflicting views to the others because they strike him as equally credible. This inability to settle disputes results, as a matter of psychological fact, in suspension of judgment. For the Pyrrhonist, then, there is a close connection between disagreement and skepticism. In contemporary discussions of the epistemic significance of peer disagreement, the potential skeptical implications of disagreement are also a focus of attention. However, few authors defend a skeptical stance—much less a radical skeptical stance like the one adopted by the Pyrrhonist. In this chapter, I take a neo-Pyrrhonian approach to the current epistemological debate between conciliationists and steadfasters about how one should rationally respond to peer disagreement. My discussion of the epistemology of disagreement will continue in Chaps. 7 and 9.

Before presenting the layout of the rest of the chapter, three remarks are in order. First, a curious fact worth mentioning is that those contemporary epistemologists who have carefully analyzed the challenge posed by the Agrippan modes have focused almost exclusively on the three modes that constitute Agrippa's trilemma, paying little or no attention to the mode from disagreement.[1] Conversely, in the growing literature on the epistemology of disagreement there is no discussion of the trilemma. This is certainly regrettable because there is much to learn from the two lines of inquiry; in fact, as noted in Chap. 4, the trilemma and the mode from disagreement were often used by the Pyrrhonists as part of the same argumentative strategy. The epistemological challenge posed by Pyrrhonism can be fully appreciated only if one combines the trilemma and the mode from disagreement.[2]

Second, when talking about the "resolution" of a disagreement in this and the next chapters, I will be referring to different senses in which a disagreement can be said to be resolved. The claim that a given dispute has been settled may be made either from the vantage point of those involved in it or from the vantage point of an uninvolved observer. In the former case, the dispute is deemed to be settled either (i) when the disputants reach consensus by sharing the reasons for their respective views, or (ii) when from a first-person perspective one comes to the conclusion that one's view is the one supported by the total available evidence bearing on the disputed matter, even if one's opponent is unable to see it. In the latter case, (iii) the

[1] An exception is Lammenranta (2008, 2011a, b, 2013).

[2] It is likewise unfortunate that specialists in ancient Pyrrhonism are in general unaware of the great deal of attention that the phenomenon of disagreement has attracted in analytic epistemology over the past fifteen years. This is regrettable because they could profit from the depth and sophistication attained in present-day discussions of the epistemic significance of disagreement.

observer thinks that the reasons offered by the disputants have enabled him to come to know the truth about the matter under dispute, even if the disputants themselves have failed to recognize what that is.

Third, in arguing against certain epistemological positions, I follow the Pyrrhonian practice: my arguments are not put forward with the intention of establishing that the positions they target are incorrect or unjustified. Rather, they are intended to show that there appear to be equipollent arguments on both sides of the issues under consideration. In other words, the arguments put forward against the views on peer disagreement to be discussed do not strike me as stronger than the arguments in their favor.

The rest of this chapter is organized as follows. In Sect. 6.2, I offer an overview of the present-day debate about the epistemic significance of peer disagreement for those readers unfamiliar with it. In Sect. 6.3, I explore the assumption, unchallenged in the disagreement literature, that factualism is true. Then, in Sect. 6.4, I discuss the equally unchallenged view that there is objective evidence bearing on at least most disputed matters, and that we can have access to the truth of those matters by considering that evidence. In so doing, I consider the disagreement about the notion of evidence, the problem of theory-ladenness, and the question of the underdetermination of theory by evidence. In Sect. 6.5, I examine whether, in the face of peer disagreement, one can rationally hold one's ground either by appealing to the alleged fact that one has adequately responded to the first-order evidence bearing on the matter at hand, or by appealing to the ineliminability of the first-person perspective and the self-trust that comes with it. In Sect. 6.6, I make some concluding remarks.

6.2 Overview of the Debate

The literature on the epistemology of disagreement has primarily focused on determining which doxastic attitude one is rationally required to adopt in the face of a disagreement with someone whom on considers an epistemic peer.[3] Discussion of peer disagreement has for the most part centered on two-person disputes, but some authors have also considered multiperson disputes—either between a person and a certain number of his peers or between groups of peers.[4]

What are epistemic peers? Two individuals are epistemic peers with regard to the question whether p if and only if there is both evidential and cognitive parity between them: they are equally familiar with the available evidence bearing on the question whether p, and they are equally intelligent, thorough, and unbiased—which means that they are *a priori* equally likely to respond appropriately to the relevant evidence. This conception of epistemic peer results from a highly abstract

[3] Some attention has been given to disputes with an epistemic superior, on which see Frances (2010, 2012, 2013).

[4] See, e.g., Lackey (2013) and Christensen (2014).

or idealized way of examining the epistemic implications of disagreement, since it cannot be applied to real-life controversies.[5] From a more realistic perspective, two individuals are epistemic peers with regard to the question whether *p* if and only if they are well acquainted with the available evidence to roughly the same degree and possess similar cognitive abilities or virtues.

Two main views have been defended in the peer disagreement literature, which are commonly labeled "conciliationist" and "steadfast." As expected, each of them comes in different varieties. In what follows, I will offer a rough characterization of the two views and their most important varieties.

Conciliationism maintains that, in the face of peer disagreement, all the parties to the dispute are rationally required to significantly revise their beliefs. That is, upon learning that a peer disagrees with me about whether *p*, I cannot rationally continue to believe that *p* or to hold the belief that *p* with the same confidence.[6] The most prominent conciliationist view on peer disagreement is what Adam Elga calls the "Equal Weight View":

> *Equal Weight View (EWV)*
>
> It is rationally required to give equal weight to the opinions of all the parties to a peer disagreement when there is no reason to prefer one opinion to the others that is independent of the disagreement itself.[7]

This view can be interpreted in two different ways depending on whether one adopts a coarse-grained or a fine-grained approach to doxastic attitudes. On the former approach, one must suspend judgment about whether *p* when one learns that a peer disagrees with one about whether *p*, since there are only three possible attitudes that may be taken, namely, belief, disbelief, and suspension. On the latter approach, the disagreeing parties must split the difference in the degrees of confidence in their respective opinions. Within a Bayesian framework, the splitting-the-difference rule may lead to suspension when, e.g., the resulting credence falls outside what are deemed to be the thresholds for belief and disbelief.

The above formulation of the EWV refers to a requirement, commonly called "Independence," which can be formulated as follows:

> *Independence*
>
> In order to resolve a peer disagreement about a given issue, the disputants must appeal to reasons that are independent of both their beliefs about the disputed issue and the considerations on the basis of which such beliefs were formed.[8]

What conciliationists seek to avoid with this principle is any dogmatic or bootstrapping move by means of which anyone could dismiss out of hand his peer's

[5] I will return to this issue in the next chapter.

[6] Various forms of conciliationism are embraced by, e.g., Feldman (2003, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2009), Christensen (2007, 2011, 2013), Elga (2007, 2010), Kornblith (2010, 2013), Matheson (2009, 2015), and Pittard (2015).

[7] For Elga's own formulation of the EWV, see Elga (2007: 490). This view is already found in Sidgwick (1895: 152–153; 1905: 464); cf. Sidgwick (1874: 321).

[8] Similar versions of this principle are explicitly endorsed by Christensen (2007), Elga (2007), and Kornblith (2010).

dissenting opinion simply because it is different from his own. Independence has been fiercely attacked by steadfasters, who claim that, at least in many cases, one's peer's disagreement over the question whether *p* shows that he has not appropriately responded to the available first-order evidence bearing on the question whether *p*.[9] This is so when, e.g., my peer disagrees with me about whether 12 x 5 = 60 or about whether there is a person sitting two feet in front of us. In these cases, it is argued, I begin with an extremely high level of confidence in the truth of my belief and the reliability of my faculties, and it is therefore absolutely clear that my peer is suffering from some kind cognitive malfunctioning or else being insincere—he may just be lying or pulling my leg. One may reply, however, that such cases can be accounted for without appealing to the belief about the disputed issue or the reasoning behind it, but to more general considerations. For it could be argued that, since it is highly unlikely that two persons thinking lucidly about the kinds of issues in question hold opposing opinions, the most probable explanation of their disagreement is that one of them is confused, disingenuous, or cognitively deficient (Christensen, 2009, 2011).

Another key thesis endorsed by at least the great majority of conciliationists is the so-called "Uniqueness Thesis":

> *Uniqueness Thesis (UT)*
>
> The total available evidence E bearing upon proposition *p* epistemically justifies only one doxastic attitude towards *p* or one degree of confidence in *p*.[10]

This thesis claims that, on the basis of E, one should believe, disbelieve, or suspend judgment about *p*. Or if one prefers a fine-grained approach to doxastic attitudes, then E justifies only one degree of confidence in *p* ranging from 0 to 1. Thus, given E, there is a unique doxastic attitude towards *p* that it is rational to adopt or a unique level of credence in *p* that it is rational to possess. It seems plain why this thesis is endorsed by most conciliationists: the reason why, in the face of peer disagreement, one is rationally required to significantly diminish one's confidence in one's belief about the disputed matter is that at most one of the beliefs held by the disputants, or some other belief they could hold, can be right. If mutually incompatible beliefs about the same matter were epistemically justified by the same evidence and the disputants were therefore fully rational in their beliefs, then there would be no need for them to revise these beliefs. Richard Feldman (2007: 204–205) explicitly claims that rejecting UT implies accepting that there can be reasonable disagreements, which is precisely what conciliationists deny. Some critics of conciliationism (of the EWV in particular) have argued that it is indissolubly linked with UT in the sense that commitment to the former implies commitment to the latter, and that given that UT is an extremely implausible claim, its strong connection with

[9] For arguments against Independence, see, e.g., Enoch (2010), Sosa (2010), Kelly (2013), and Lord (2014).

[10] The expression "Uniqueness Thesis" is Feldman's (2007). Christensen (2007) speaks of "Rational Uniqueness." Proponents of UT include Christensen (2007), Feldman (2007), and Matheson (2011). Detractors include Douven (2009), Conee (2010), and Ballantyne and Coffman (2011, 2012). Strong doubts about the truth of UT are also voiced by Kelly (2010: 120–121).

conciliationism is fatal to this view (e.g., Kelly, 2010: 119–121).[11] Those who reject UT endorse some kind of epistemic permissiveness, which might be formulated thus:

Permissiveness

The total available evidence E bearing on proposition *p* is compatible with different doxastic attitudes towards *p* or with different degrees of confidence in *p*.[12]

Conciliationism is rejected by those who hold steadfast views on peer disagreement. According to these views, it is perfectly rational or reasonable to retain one's belief in the face of most of peer disagreements.[13] There are two main steadfast positions. Some claim that one can usually legitimately ignore one's peer's belief about the disputed matter and retain one's own with the same degree of confidence. Others affirm that, although one is always required to give some weight to one's peer's belief, one can usually retain one's belief with a degree of confidence that is close to one's initial degree of confidence. Each of these positions, in turn, may be further subdivided depending on whether their advocates accept epistemic permissiveness. Thus, those who endorse the first position may claim either that only one of the disputants can dismiss his peer's belief and retain his own with the same level of confidence or that both disputants can do so. And those who endorse the second view may contend either that only one of the disputants can retain his belief with a slightly diminished level of confidence or that both can do so.[14] It may be argued that acceptance or rejection of epistemic permissiveness is not the only basis for this distinction. For the question of the rationality or reasonableness of peer disagreement may be couched either in terms of which of the competing views is in fact best supported by the evidence, or rather in terms of whether from a first-person perspective each of the disputants has legitimate reasons for preferring his own view to his rival's.[15] Being reasonable or rational in one sense does not entail being reasonable or rational in the other, so even if one rejects epistemic permissiveness, there may still be a sense in which all disputants can be rational or reasonable in sticking to their guns. Accordingly, acceptance or rejection of UT is relevant to the question of the rationality or reasonableness of peer disagreement only if this question is tackled in terms of which of the competing views is in fact best supported by the evidence bearing on the disputed issue. What all steadfast views have in common is

[11] Ballantyne and Coffman (2012) agree with Kelly in criticizing conciliationism, but they claim that this view does not necessarily commit one to UT because there is also a permissive form of conciliationism. In this regard, note that Christensen (2007: 211; 2009: 763–764) already argues that some permissive accounts of rational belief are compatible with conciliationism.

[12] For a detailed criticism of epistemic permissiveness, see White (2005), who nonetheless does not claim to endorse UT.

[13] Steadfast positions are defended by, e.g., Plantinga (2000), van Inwagen (1996, 2010), Rosen (2001), Kelly (2005, 2010), Wedgwood (2007, 2010), Enoch (2010), Sosa (2010), Weatherson (2013, 2019), Weintraub (2013), and Schafer (2015).

[14] For instance, Rosen (2001), Wedgwood (2007), Sosa (2010), Weintraub (2013), and Schafer (2015) claim that each of the disagreeing parties may reasonably or rationally hold his ground, while Kelly (2005) maintains that only one of the parties may do so.

[15] As far as I can tell, Kelly (2005) understands rationality or reasonableness in the first sense, whereas Wedgwood (2007) and Sosa (2010) understand it in the second.

their rejection of Independence, since they maintain that a person can prefer his own view to that of his rival by appealing to the fact of the disagreement itself.

6.3 Factualism

Those engaged in the debate on the epistemic relevance of peer disagreement are in general committed to at least two of the following three claims: (i) there is an objective fact of the matter about at least most disputed issues, and hence an objective truth about them; (ii) we possess objective evidence on the basis of which we can have access to the truth of the matter about most disputed issues; and (iii) most peer disputes can be settled by attending to which disputant has adequately responded to the evidence. Commitment to (i) and (ii) is shared by both conciliationists and steadfasters, whereas only the latter endorse (iii) or similar claims. I will argue that all three claims can be called into question from a neo-Pyrrhonian perspective. In this section, I will deal with (i), while in the next two sections I will address (ii) and (iii).

The assumption that there is an objective fact of the matter regarding at least most controversial issues strikes me as arbitrary. The reason is not that I deny that there is such a thing as objective facts; the reason is rather that we do not seem entitled to take that for granted. If so, then it may be argued that the philosophical inquiry into the epistemic significance of disagreement should also include a discussion of whether the existence of deep and widespread controversies is at least partially an indication that there is no objective fact of the matter. A cursory look at a familiar discussion in metaethics may help make my point clear.

John Leslie Mackie based his moral error theory on two arguments, one of which is the argument from relativity, which exploits the pervasive disagreements about moral issues.[16] In his view, the existence of deep, persistent, and widespread moral disagreements is best explained by the non-existence of objective moral values, properties, or facts: "the actual variations in the moral codes are more readily explained by the hypothesis that they reflect ways of life than by the hypothesis that they express perceptions, most of them seriously inadequate and badly distorted, of objective values" (Mackie, 1977: 37). The alternative realist explanation would require that we possess a moral faculty that is highly unreliable inasmuch as our moral errors would not be sporadic and temporary, but recurrent and lasting (Mackie, 1946: 78). If there is no objective moral fact of the matter about any issue, then it is no mystery why people disagree deeply, persistently, and widely on what the objective moral fact of the matter is. The neo-Pyrrhonist does not of course endorse Mackie's argument from relativity but only takes it into consideration as a possible account of the existence of widespread and long-running moral disagreements: the

[16] Moral error theory is, roughly, the view that first-order moral judgments are truth-apt because they are assertions that attribute moral properties to objects, but they are all false because such properties do not exist or are not instantiated.

very existence of those disagreements should make us aware of the *possibility* that there is not an objective fact of the matter about the disputed issues. He emphasizes that, just as there are metaethicists who believe that there is an objective fact of the matter about disputed moral issues, so too are there metaethicists who claim that there are no objective moral facts. If each of the disputants attempted to prove that their own view is correct, the neo-Pyrrhonist would appeal to the modes of infinite regress, reciprocity, and hypothesis: any such proof continues *ad infinitum*, or is circular, or rests on an arbitrary assumption. In the face of this second-order disagreement between moral factualists and non-factualists, the neo-Pyrrhonist feels compelled to suspend judgment.

The assumption that there is an objective fact or truth of the matter about most of disputed issues is very rarely mentioned in the peer disagreement literature. For instance, Thomas Kelly is well aware of the possibility of non-factualism, but he decides not to pursue the question of whether this view is true. The reason is that he is quite confident that there are domains in which there is a genuine fact of the matter, and his aim is to determine how disagreements in those domains should affect our beliefs (Kelly, 2005: 172–173). Similarly, at the beginning of an article offering an overview of the epistemology of disagreement, David Christensen limits himself to saying that his focus "will be on disagreement on issues where the factuality of the subject matter is not in dispute" (2009: 766 n. 1). The problem with the view of these two authors is that whether factualism is true seems to be something that should be established rather than taken for granted by any systematic and thorough exploration of the epistemic implications of disagreement.

An attitude towards factualism similar to Kelly's and Christensen's is adopted by David Enoch, who at the beginning of his discussion of peer disagreement makes the following preliminary remark:

> Our concern here is with cases in which some metaphysical non-factualism, or relativism of some sort, is just not a relevant option (perhaps because we have strong independent reasons to rule it out). Our question, then, is entirely epistemological. (2010: 955)

And in a note, he adds:

> The only way to insist that there is something illegitimate about restricting the discussion to just the epistemological question, it seems to me, is to argue that there cannot be cases of disagreement of the relevant kind where we are justifiably metaphysically confident in the status of the relevant subject matter. I do not see why we should believe that this is so. (2010: 955 n. 4)

Two interrelated remarks are in order. The first concerns Enoch's claim that the question he is addressing is purely epistemological. Even though one can of course decide to set metaphysical issues aside and focus on epistemological ones, in the present case such a move seems arbitrary if one does not offer convincing reasons for so doing. As already noted, the phenomenon of disagreement is epistemologically relevant also because it makes us wonder whether there is an objective truth of the matter about the disputed issues. I mean, is it epistemologically beside the point to wonder whether there is an objective fact of the matter about the disputed issues that would render some of the competing beliefs about those issues true? I do not

think that the metaphysical question can simply be kept apart from the epistemological one. Still, it might be argued that, for practical purposes, one may legitimately decide not to discuss some key aspects of an issue. Although this may be a legitimate decision, I do not think that it applies to the present case, which brings me to my second remark.

If I understand Enoch correctly, what he is saying in the second quoted passage is that, in order to question or challenge the view that there is an objective fact of the matter about most contested issues, one should adopt a non-factualist stance. But why on earth would that be the case? A neo-Pyrrhonist may ask factualists to lay out the allegedly compelling arguments in favor of their metaphysical view *just as* he may ask non-factualists to lay out the allegedly compelling arguments in favor of their contrary metaphysical view. In order to cast doubt on either of these views, he does not need to embrace the opposite view but only to appeal to the disagreement between them. Indeed, if factualists or non-factualists start the discussion of the epistemic implications of disagreement presupposing the truth of their views, then the neo-Pyrrhonist will point out that they are taking for granted something that is the object of a long-standing dispute that needs to be settled in a non-question-begging manner. It is thus perfectly possible that factualism (or non-factualism) be questioned or challenged by someone who approaches the topic of peer disagreement with an agnostic and open-minded attitude.

6.4 Evidence

Even if one grants for the sake of argument that there is such a thing as an objective truth of the matter about most contested issues,[17] one must still address the problems faced by the claim that there is objective evidence on the basis of which we can have access to the truth of the matter about those issues.

The first problem concerns the existence of distinct conceptions of evidence. A contemporary Pyrrhonist can emphasize, for example, the debate among logical positivists on the nature and epistemic status of "protocol sentences," i.e., basic or elementary observational statements whose function is to report one's evidence. Logical positivists disagreed particularly about whether such basic statements refer to the subject's private sensory experiences or to public physical events and about whether they are infallible in the sense that one cannot be mistaken about the character of one's current experience.[18] The problem was that each party to these disagreements showed that the rival position faced intractable difficulties. The debate on protocol sentences shows that not even philosophers belonging to the same

[17] This concessive form of argumentation is commonly used by Sextus and can be traced back to Gorgias's treatise *On What Is Not*, which is summarized in the first book of *Against the Logicians* (*AD* I 65–86) and in the anonymous *On Melissus, Xenophanes, and Gorgias* (979a11–980b22).

[18] See, e.g., Hempel (1945a, b, 1965), Ayer (1959a: 13–14, 17–21; 1959b), Carnap (1959), Neurath (1959), and Schlick (1959).

school or movement reach consensus about the nature of evidence or the sorts of things that are eligible to count as evidence. In contemporary philosophy more generally one finds quite different views of what evidence is: facts, sense data, the stimulation of our sensory receptors, known propositions, our occurrent thoughts (see Kelly, 2008, 2016). The neo-Pyrrhonist exploits this philosophical controversy about the notion of evidence to make the point that epistemological discussions of disagreement appeal to a notion that is itself a matter of an unresolved disagreement.

Even if we grant for the sake of argument that there is consensus about the correct conception of evidence, it is not clear that there is such a thing as objective evidence that is there to be discovered and examined and that supports one or more of the competing views that are held on the disputed matter or some other view that could be held. One of the main topics of intense debate in philosophy of science is whether, and to what extent, theory influences observation. We are all familiar with Thomas Kuhn's view that what the proponents of competing scientific theories regard as objective evidence is at least in part dependent on the theories they endorse. When a paradigm shift takes place due to a scientific revolution, scientists see the world in a radically different way by experiencing something similar to a Gestalt switch (Kuhn, 1996). In a similar vein, Paul Feyerabend claimed that each scientific theory possesses its own experience—so that there is no overlap in the experiences of competing scientific theories—and that experimental evidence consists, not of pure facts, but of facts "manufactured" according to some theory (Feyerabend, 1962, 1965). Analogous views were advanced by less well-known authors such as Ludwik Fleck (1979) and Norwood Hanson (1958). On all these views, what counts as evidence hinges at least to a considerable extent on the various theories scientists use to interpret experience, so that any report of observational evidence is, partially at least, theory dependent. The existence of persistent disagreements among seemingly competent and fully informed scientists should therefore make us aware of the *possibility* that those disagreements are to be explained by the fact that there is no objective evidence that could function as neutral arbiter between competing scientific theories. As far as I can see, the same possibility cannot be dismissed without careful examination regarding many of the disagreements we encounter in philosophy or in ordinary life.

As with Mackie's argument from relativity, the neo-Pyrrhonist does not endorse the views of the theory-ladenness of observation advanced by Kuhn, Feyerabend, Fleck, or Hanson, but only takes them into consideration as possible accounts of the existence of persistent scientific disputes. He observes that, just as there are philosophers of science who believe that there is objective evidence that serves as a touchstone that makes it possible to adjudicate scientific disagreements, so too are there philosophers of science who claim that there is no such thing as objective evidence that serves as a neutral arbiter. And when each of the contending parties offers arguments in support of their view, the neo-Pyrrhonist appeals to the Agrippan trilemma to show that those arguments lead to an infinite regress, or are circular, or rest on arbitrary assumptions. In the face of this second-order dispute, the neo-Pyrrhonist finds himself compelled to suspend judgment.

Even if it is granted that there is such a thing as objective evidence, there remains the question of whether we can have access to the truth of the matter about the contested issues on the basis of that evidence. Reflection on the familiar skeptical challenges to the possibility of knowledge shows, at least for some of us, that we cannot simply take for granted that we are able, on the basis of the evidence we possess, to come to know the truth about the contested issues. The phenomenon of peer disagreement should also make us wonder whether cognitive access to the truth is possible. For it might be argued that, if it were indeed possible, then there would not have been over the centuries groups of seemingly equally smart, well-trained, knowledgeable, and honest thinkers disagreeing about moral, political, religious, epistemological, or metaphysical issues. Let us consider a disagreement between a theist and an atheist. Given that the theist believes that he has compelling evidence of the truth of theism, he must think that the atheist either lacks the evidence in question or else does have it but is unable to realize that it supports belief in theism. To explain how this is possible, the theist can appeal, for example, to a capacity of insight or intuition by means of which he can have access to the relevant evidence or see what it is evidence for.[19] This maneuver is ineffective inasmuch as the problem of disagreement re-emerges in case the atheist replies that his own capacity of insight enables him to see either that the theist lacks the evidence he claims to possess or that the shared evidence actually supports belief in atheism. As far as I can see, we here reach an impasse and any choice between the two camps is arbitrary, from both a third- and a first-person perspective. An onlooker who holds no views on the disputed matter observes that the disputants appeal to the same maneuver and he cannot therefore decide whom he should trust. And once each of the disputants becomes aware that his opponent too appeals to intuition in support of his view, each of them may wonder whether he can rely on intuition to have access to the relevant evidence or to see what it is evidence for. I will say more about this kind of dialectical-cum-epistemic symmetry that can be appreciated from the first-person perspective in the next section and in Chap. 7.

It could be argued that the reason there are widespread and persistent disagreements particularly in such areas as morality, religion, politics, and philosophy is that the total available evidence E bearing on the disputed issue is insufficient to decide which of the conflicting views should be endorsed. That is to say, the possibility cannot be excluded that the disagreements are due, not to the fact that one of the disputants does not have (full) access to E or has misevaluated E, but to the fact that

[19] For the view that disagreements can be settled by relying on insight or intuition, see, e.g., van Inwagen (1996, 2010), Wedgwood (2007, 2010), and Bogardus (2009). Reading about such appeals to intuition reminds me of Philip Kitcher's remark that in ethics and mathematics "the appeal to intuition is an epistemology of desperation" (2006: 176). Needless to say, I do not affirm that intuition is unreliable. My point is simply that sometimes one can perceive the scent of desperation and sometimes the scent of arrogance when people—particularly philosophers—resort to intuition when confronted with someone who deeply disagrees with them. One has the impression that some people are thinking "I don't really know what else I can say to explain why I see things the way I do," whereas others are thinking "I have this special insight that enables me to see truths to which unfortunately others are blind."

the choice between the conflicting views is underdetermined by E. The competing views are thus incompatible with each other but compatible with the available evidential data, which support them equally well: the competing views constitute equally good explanations of E.[20] Epistemologists agree that there are situations in which the available evidence is insufficient to settle a dispute and that in such situations suspension of judgment is rationally required, but they believe that this is not what happens in the great majority of cases. By contrast, the position under consideration here concerns, not specific disputes, but disputes in general: the existence of widespread and persistent disagreements is best explained by the view that the opposing beliefs are underdetermined by the evidence. On this view, no disagreement can be resolved by appealing to the total available evidence bearing on the disputed issue even if there is consensus about what counts as relevant evidence and even if there are no epistemic asymmetries between the disputants. Here again, it must be noted that the neo-Pyrrhonist does not claim that the account of disagreement that appeals to the underdetermination thesis is the correct one, but only remarks that it is a possible account that does not strike him as less persuasive than rival accounts.

To close this section, let me consider the following objection: in problematizing the appeal to evidence in the debate on peer disagreement, the neo-Pyrrhonist creates a problem not only for steadfasters but also for conciliationists, who are often taken to occupy the skeptical side in the debate. Given that conciliationist arguments assume that there is objective evidence, questioning this assumption dissolves the skeptical problem of peer disagreement, thereby being a double-edged sword for the neo-Pyrrhonist. As noted in Sect. 6.3, most conciliationists endorse the Uniqueness Thesis (UT) and it seems clear that the notion of evidence that the proponents of UT have in mind is that of objective evidence. Now, conciliationism maintains that, in the face of peer disagreement, the contending parties should significantly revise their beliefs. Given that such a revision amounts to suspension of judgment on a coarse-grained approach to doxastic attitudes, conciliationism seems to come very close to Pyrrhonism, and so it might be thought that undermining UT backfires on the neo-Pyrrhonist by evaporating the skeptical problem stemming from peer disagreement. The difficulty in question is, however, merely apparent because—as already noted in Chap. 4—the similarity between Pyrrhonism and conciliationism is actually rather superficial. Let me focus here on two of the dissimilarities. First, the neo-Pyrrhonist suspends judgment in the face of all the disagreements he has so far investigated, whereas even radical conciliationists claim that the suspension of judgment they recommend is local. Among the disagreements in the face of which the neo-Pyrrhonist suspends judgment is the second-order dispute between proponents and opponents of UT. Second, suspending judgment about

[20] For a good overview of underdetermination, see Kelly (2008: 935–937, 952 n. 2). The idea of theory being underdetermined by evidence may be present in Sextus's exposition of the second of the eight modes that Aenesidemus directed against causal explanations: "some often give a single causal explanation of the object of investigation, although there is a rich variety of alternative explanations" (*PH* I 181).

UT is not a problem for him because his suspension is not based on a commitment to UT, and so that his attack on it does not backfire on him. Indeed, the neo-Pyrrhonist does not assert that we are rationally required to suspend judgment whenever that is the attitude best supported by the objective evidence. Rather, suspension is—as argued in Chap. 5—a state of mind in which, as a matter of psychological fact, he finds himself whenever conflicting views strike him as equipollent. Note also that suspending judgment about rather than denying the truth UT does not dissolve the skeptical problem stemming from peer disagreement because it is still unclear whether, when involved in a peer disagreement, one can rationally hold one's ground or should rather suspend judgment about the matter under dispute.

6.5 Evidence Assessment, First-Person Perspective, and Self-Trust

Even if we grant for the sake of argument that there is consensus about what evidence is or what sorts of things can count as evidence, that there is such a thing as objective evidence, and that we can in principle have access to the truth of the matter about most disputed issues on the basis of the available evidence, we must still address the question of whether it is possible to determine which of the competing views, if any, is supported by the available evidence. In this section, I will address that question by examining whether, in the face of a disagreement with an epistemic peer, one can rationally hold one's ground by appealing either to the alleged fact, on this particular occasion, one has adequately responded to the first-order evidence bearing on the disputed matter, or to the ineliminability of the first-person perspective and the self-trust that comes with it. In the next two chapters, I will address that question by exploring whether one can rationally hold one's ground by relying on introspectively acquired information about one's own mental states and the normal functioning of one's own cognitive faculties.

Thomas Kelly (2005) argues that, even when there is evidential and cognitive equality between the parties to a dispute, it may be rational to prefer the opinion of one party to that of the other. The reason is that a peer disagreement can be resolved by appealing to the way in which the evidence bearing on the disputed issue has been evaluated by the disagreeing parties: one can privilege the opinion of one party over the opinion of the other provided that it is the result of the correct assessment of the evidence. As Kelly remarks, how well the epistemic peers have evaluated "the evidence with respect to a given question is […] exactly the sort of consideration that is capable of producing the kind of asymmetry that would justify privileging one of the two parties to the dispute over the other party" (2005: 179). Kelly also maintains that, even if the higher-order evidence that is provided by the belief of one's epistemic peer is treated as further evidence that bears on the disputed question, it does not follow that skepticism is the correct response to peer disagreement. Before learning about one's epistemic peer's contrary belief, one's total evidence

consisted of the first-order evidence E, while after learning about his belief the total evidence E' includes (i) the first-order evidence E, (ii) the fact that one believes hypothesis H on the basis of E, and (iii) the fact that one's epistemic peer believes hypothesis not-H on the basis of E. According to Kelly, the reason E' does not invariably mandate an attitude of suspension is that,

> if we give equal weight to (ii) and (iii), then H will be more probable than not-H on the new evidence E', given that it was more probable on the original evidence E. Our original evidence E does not simply vanish or become irrelevant once we learn what the other person believes on the basis of that evidence: rather, it continues to play a role as an important subset of the new total evidence E'. In general, what one is and is not justified in believing on the basis of E' will depend a great deal on the character of the first-order evidence E. (2005: 190)

Kelly (2010) develops, and in important respects modifies, this line of argument by defending what he calls the "Total Evidence View" (TEV). He objects that advocates of the EWV maintain that the first-order evidence should be ignored and that we must only attend to the disagreement itself, that is, we must only attend to the fact that my opponent and I have opposing beliefs, thus disregarding who has appropriately responded to the original evidence.[21] In other words, in cases in which one has both first-order and higher-order evidence, proponents of the EWV claim that the latter is the only evidence that matters, as if there were no difference from cases in which one has no access to the first-order evidence (Kelly, 2010: 122–124). The TEV, by contrast, claims that both types of evidence must be taken into consideration, and that whether peer disagreement should cause one to slightly decrease one's degree of confidence in one's opinion, or to suspend judgment, or to adopt an opinion that is closer to one's opponent's than to one's own, depends on how substantial the two types of evidence are compared to each other. A key departure from his 2005 essay is that Kelly now believes that the higher-order evidence provided by the disagreement of an epistemic peer is always epistemically significant, and hence that one's confidence in one's own belief about the disputed matter is always at least slightly diminished when confronted with such a disagreement (cf. Kelly, 2005: 181–182, 187–188). This is so even if one has in fact adequately responded to the first-order evidence. Despite this difference between the two essays, Kelly still thinks that, in some cases, the fact that one has correctly evaluated the initial evidence justifies one in privileging one's own opinion over that of one's peer—although not with the same degree of confidence. This idea of correct evidence assessment is the main target of the criticism that follows.

I think there are at least four reasons why Kelly's line of argument fails to show that, in the face of peer disagreement, one can sometimes legitimately retain one's belief, thereby avoiding skepticism.[22] The first reason is that one should bear in

[21] This objection is also raised by Enoch (2010: 969).

[22] Given that Weatherson (2013) follows the main line of argument advanced by Kelly (2010), the reasons to be given in the body of the text also apply to his steadfast stance. Weatherson (2019: 211–212) briefly engages with the neo-Pyrrhonian stance laid out in Machuca (2013), concluding thus: "Machuca is defending a form of Pyrrhonian skepticism. And many of my defenses of exter-

mind that what the epistemic peers disagree about is precisely the evaluation of the first-order evidence E. Once they find out that they hold opposing beliefs about whether *p*, they engage in an argumentative exchange in which each tries to offer compelling reasons in favor of their own evaluation of E. Hence, even when E is the key part of the total evidence E', one still needs to offer non-question-begging reasons for affirming that one has adequately evaluated E, and hence that E actually supports one's belief about whether *p*. Claiming that E does in fact supports one's own belief seems to be an arbitrary move. This applies not only to the view proposed in Kelly (2005), but also to that advanced in Kelly (2010). For, in the latter essay, he maintains that, in some cases, the first-order evidence is the key part of the total evidence, and hence tends to swamp the higher-order evidence. In those cases, the disputant who has appropriately responded to the first-order evidence can legitimately privilege his own belief over his dissenter's. Kelly (2010) is well aware of the present criticism, which he considers to be based upon the so-called dialectical conception of evidence. Since I will tackle this conception of evidence at the end of the present section, I postpone discussion of Kelly's objection to it until then.

My second reason for calling into question Kelly's line of argument has to do with a point he makes in the course of explaining why, upon learning that a peer disagrees with one about whether *p*, one should always change one's degree of confidence:

> One should give some weight to one's peer's opinion, even when from the God's-eye point of view one has evaluated the evidence correctly and he has not. But why? Exactly because one does not occupy the God's-eye point of view with respect to the question of who has evaluated the evidence correctly and who has not. (2010: 138, cf. 154–155)

I may be missing something here, but if the fact that one has no access to the vantage point of a neutral and omniscient external observer determines that one cannot dismiss one's peer's opinion entirely, why does such a fact not determine as well that one should give equal weight to one's opinion and to the opinion of one's peer? To put the point differently, why does such a fact allow one, in certain cases, to retain a high degree of confidence in one's original opinion? Kelly might respond by saying that, in certain circumstances, one may have a compelling reason for privileging one's own opinion over that of one's epistemic peer, and that the purpose of the God's-eye point is only to remind one of one's own fallibility, thus preventing one from dismissing out of hand the dissenting opinion of one's epistemic peer. I will tackle the second part of this possible response when expounding my fourth reason for being unconvinced by Kelly's line of argument. In relation to the first part, let me note that Kelly maintains that one can be justified in thinking that one has appropriately responded to the first-order evidence even in the absence of independent evidence that one has done so. For the reason one holds a given belief is precisely that

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nalism involved showing that the principles deployed against externalism had implausible consequences. In particular, they implied Pyrrhonian skepticism. Now that won't look implausible to a Pyrrhonian like Machuca. I must simply note that I'm taking it as a fixed point that we do know a lot, and that Pyrrhonian skepticism is false" (2019: 212). I agree with Weatherson that we here reach a stalemate, and I am glad that he recognizes that Pyrrhonism is for some a live option.

one *recognizes* that it is supported by the evidence one possesses, and one would not be able to recognize this if one were unjustified in thinking that the evidence does support the belief in question (Kelly, 2010: 155–156). But note that, just as one can affirm that one's own belief is justified because one recognizes that the available evidence supports it, so too can one's opponent affirm that his own belief is justified because he recognizes that the available evidence supports it. And if one were to argue that one's opponent is clearly mistaken because one would not recognize that one's own belief is supported by the evidence if one were not justified in thinking that it is, one's opponent would reply that it is he who cannot be mistaken because he would not recognize that the evidence supports his own belief were he not justified in so thinking. It is clear that the TEV is a form of internalism about justification, and Kelly himself says so. But then it is faced with the problem that, when the evidence does not support one's belief, there might be no indication that this is so, and hence "when one's judgment as to the epistemic status of some belief that one holds is faulty, there is nothing that guarantees that this fact will be revealed by further reflection, no matter how conscientiously such reflection is conducted" (Kelly, 2010: 169). Given his acknowledgment that his view is faced with this kind of problem, one would expect Kelly to end up in a state of agnosticism. Far from that, he seeks consolation in the fact that it is dubious that such a problem can be "avoided by any plausible view about justification, including paradigmatically internalist ones" (2010: 169–170).[23] What is supposed to be the epistemic value of this claim? Does the fact that an intractable difficulty is not faced exclusively by one's view but by most or all related views make one's view immune to it? The difficulty is still there, and if it is deemed to be a genuine problem, then one must either show how it is to be solved or else accept that one's view is undermined.

The third reason for considering Kelly's maneuver ineffective is that, by appealing to the Modes of Agrippa, one can argue that none of the epistemic peers can establish that it is he rather than his rival who has correctly evaluated the first-order evidence. For any argument that attempts to establish that, on a given occasion, one of the epistemic peers has assessed the evidence better than his rival would be the target of a combined attack of Agrippa's trilemma. That is, any such argument leads to an infinite regress, or is circular, or rests on an arbitrary claim. In fact, Kelly's maneuver seems to amount to a bare assertion. If so, then one can remark—following Sextus (*PH* I 173, *AD* II 370, *AM* III 8)—that such a maneuver fails because, if one of the epistemic peers is trustworthy when he makes the bare assertion in question, his opponent can simply make the opposite assertion and, in so doing, he will be no less trustworthy.

The final reason why Kelly's maneuver seems ineffective is that one should bear in mind that oftentimes it has happened that, despite being highly confident that one had correctly evaluated the first-order evidence bearing on the disputed matter and that one's opponent was therefore mistaken, one later changed one's mind and regarded one's opponent's view as correct. Even supposing that no such thing has

[23] As we will see below, the same consolation is sought by Enoch (2010).

happened to one, oftentimes one has witnessed how one's opponent, despite feeling extremely confident that his view on the disputed matter was correct, later discovered that one was right. Either of these memories should make one wonder whether at present one's high degree of confidence in one's own view is unwarranted. Someone will probably reply that this only shows that we are fallible when it comes to evaluating evidence. I must confess that I do not see how awareness of this fallibility should not significantly lower one's confidence that one has correctly evaluated the evidence, especially when one is involved in a disagreement with someone whom one regards as an epistemic peer. Kelly himself recognizes that the question of which of the disagreeing parties has *in fact* correctly assessed the evidence is a "non-trivial, substantive intellectual question" (2005: 180). However, surprisingly enough, this does not undermine his confidence in the correctness of his view, for he immediately remarks that

> here as elsewhere, life is difficult. On any plausible conception of evidence, we will be extremely fallible with respect to questions about what our evidence supports. The amount of disagreement that we find among well-informed individuals simply makes this fact more salient than would otherwise be the case. (2005: 180; cf. 2010: 165)

If a person is fully aware of his extreme fallibility, which explains his past mistakes even on those occasions when he was highly confident that he had adequately evaluated the first-order evidence, how can he now, when faced with a disagreeing peer, claim that it is he who has correctly evaluated the first-order evidence? The existence of peer disagreements does make more salient how fragile our epistemic situation is but, *pace* Kelly, reflection on the serious epistemic difficulties surrounding our lives appears to lead to agnostic skepticism.

I would now like to consider the steadfast view defended by David Enoch (2010), who argues that the proponents of the EWV mistakenly believe that one's disagreement with another person cannot be taken as evidence against that person's reliability. His argument is based on the ineliminability of the first-person perspective and the self-trust that comes with it.[24] That the first-person perspective cannot be completely eliminated seems to be clear. For example, when encountering someone who disagrees with me about a given question, it is I who judge whether that person is my epistemic peer or rather my epistemic superior or inferior, and hence it is I who determine whether I am rationally required to revise my opinion and, if so, to what extent. Even if I adopt a third-person perspective to analyze the disagreement, the first-person perspective cannot in the end be eliminated, since the analysis is ultimately conducted from a first-person vantage point: it is I who determine how the disagreement would look from an allegedly neutral vantage point. There thus seems to be an unavoidable degree of trust in my own opinions.

[24] For other views that appeal to self-trust to justify steadfastness in the face of peer disagreement, see Foley (2001: 79, 108–112), Wedgwood (2010), Pasnau (2015), and Schafer (2015). For critical discussion of the appeal to self-trust in relation to peer disagreement, see Christensen (2007: 196–198, 204), Littlejohn (2013: 184–189), Rattan (2014), and Peter (2019).

Returning to Enoch's argument, he claims that, given the ineliminability of the first-person perspective and the self-trust that comes with it, when I believe that *p*, I can legitimately take my opponent's belief that not-*p* as evidence that he is mistaken and, hence, that he is less reliable than I am on the topic at hand. In his view, proceeding thus is not question-begging, or at least not in a way that is objectionable.[25] The reason is that such a procedure is not exclusive to his view on peer disagreement: whenever we deliberate epistemically about anything, we start from our own vantage point. But Enoch is aware that things are not that easy, for he adds:

> If this is a cause for concern, it is a cause for much more general concern (indeed, if this fact undermines justification, the most radical of scepticisms seems to follow, a point to which I return below). […] The point, then, quite simply, is this: perhaps there is something suspicious in your taking the disagreement itself as evidence that [your opponent] is less reliable that you may have thought, indeed as stronger evidence for his unreliability than for your own. But there is nothing *more* suspicious in this piece of evidence compared to pretty much all others. Hoping for the kind of justification that avoids this difficulty is a hope most of us have come to resist, perhaps a part of epistemically growing up. (2010: 980–981, cf. 992)

Thus, even though Enoch's line of argument is question-begging, allegedly this is not problematic because the reason it is so is the same reason any attempt at justification ultimately begs the question. But why on earth does the question-begging nature of his line of argument become innocuous for the simple reason that it is not exclusive to it? It seems that Enoch's confidence in his line of argument is to be explained by his belief that radical skepticism about justification is not an option worth considering—at least not if you are an epistemic grown-up. I will come back to his attitude towards skepticism in a moment.

Enoch regards as an objection to his view Christensen's claim that disagreement itself can be taken as evidence not only against my opponent's reliability but also against my own reliability, which preserves the epistemic symmetry between us (Christensen, 2007: 196). Enoch argues that this line of thought is mistaken because my reason for demoting my rival from the status of epistemic peer is not that he believes not-*p* whereas I believe *p*, but rather that he believes not-*p* whereas *p*. That is, the reason is not that his belief is different from mine, but that it is false. He is aware that this move might well be challenged by a skeptic, but once again he simply dismisses skepticism out of hand:

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[25] Richard Foley remarks that skeptical worries about the reliability of our faculties are inescapable and that we must accept that skepticism cannot be refuted, which means that there is no non-question-begging way to guarantee their reliability. For this reason, inquiry always involves a substantial dose of trust or faith in our faculties and the beliefs they generate. Although he recognizes that such self-trust cannot be defended in a non-question-begging way, he thinks it can be reasonable for us to have it. For rationality does not require the ability to provide a non-question-begging defense of one's reliability, and even if, unbeknownst to one, one is deceived into having unreliable beliefs about one's environment, one may still be rational in the sense of having beliefs that, from one's own perspective, are invulnerable to criticism. See Foley (2001: 4, 19–20, 25, 78, 99, 153, 174).

> We can put this by saying that your reason to change your mind about [your opponent's] reliability is—together with his belief that *not-p*—not *that you believe p*, but rather *that p (as you believe)*. But to insist that the 'as you believe' qualifier rules out *that p* as a reason for belief is precisely to ignore the ineliminability point, and to insist on the impossibly high standard that leads to scepticism more generally. Let us not do that, then. (2010: 982)

At least four remarks are in order concerning this passage. First, we are faced here with a problem already mentioned in relation to Kelly's view: the subject of the dispute between my rival and me is precisely whether *that p* or *that not-p*. That is, we engage in an argumentative exchange in order to determine which is true, or at least epistemically justified: my belief that *p* or rather his belief that not-*p*. And so, Enoch is again faced with the charge that his argument falls prey to the fallacy of *petitio principii*. Of course, he tries to meet this charge by appealing to the first-person perspective, but, as I will argue below, his move does not seem successful.

Second, Enoch (2010: 984) recognizes that just as I can take *that p* (as I believe) as evidence against my opponent's reliability, so too can he take *that not-p* (as he believes) as evidence against my reliability. It is therefore clear that the disagreement cannot be resolved from the vantage point of an uninvolved observer—as Enoch himself acknowledges (2010: 986 n. 62)—because there is a dialectical symmetry between the disputants. But what is more important is that, from a first-person point of view, it seems that, once I become aware that my rival demotes me because *that not-p* (as he believes), I may wonder whether I am really entitled to demote him because *that p* (as I believe). Enoch himself recognizes that my reason for demoting my rival is not factive because "this can be [my] reason (what [I] take to be the normatively relevant feature of the circumstances) even if in fact [my rival] is not wrong" (2010: 984). Thus, there seems to be a dialectical symmetry between my rival and me that has epistemic implications, the kind of symmetry that calls for suspension of judgment and that can be appreciated from a first-person point of view. Enoch argues that the symmetry I am committed to is that between my view and my rival's, not between *p* and not-*p* (insofar as I believe *p*), and so my reason for demoting my rival (i.e., *that p*) is not a reason I have for demoting myself. But, once again, my rival can reason in exactly the same way (something of which I am fully aware), and so there seems to remain a dialectical-cum-epistemic symmetry between us. If I say to my rival, "You're wrong, not because of my *believing that p*, but because *that p*," and he replies, "No, you're the one who's wrong, not because of my *believing that not-p*, but because *that not-p*," it seems that we are faced with an impasse insofar as each of us is reasoning in the same manner and therefore needs to come up with a non-question-begging way to resolve the dispute. It might be argued that I know that an uninvolved observer should suspend judgment, but that my knowing this gives me no reason to do the same precisely because I am privy to the first-order evidence the observer lacks (cf. Enoch, 2010: 986 n. 62). But my rival is in principle also privy to the same evidence and our dispute concerns the question of whether the available first-order evidence supports *that p* or *that not-p*. The key point is that, from my own first-person perspective, I am aware both of the symmetry resulting from the fact that both my rival and I appeal to self-trust in an attempt to show that one is entitled to stick to one's own view in the face of peer

disagreement, and of the fact that I regard my rival's view as incorrect despite his relying on self-trust. Such awareness undermines self-trust as a reliable source of true beliefs: I can regard an opponent as holding false beliefs about many of the issues about which we disagree despite his relying on self-trust. I thus become aware that self-trust is no guarantee that my beliefs about controversial issues are true. For what is so special about myself that, unlike my opponent, I cannot be mistaken in my belief despite relying on self-trust?

The type of dialectical-cum-epistemic symmetry I have in mind can be seen more clearly in Karl Schafer's defense of a view he calls Rational Symmetry View:

> [When] two individuals, who are equally aware of each other's evidence, and neither of whom have any special reason to treat themselves as less (or more) reliable than the other, have a disagreement about some issue, both should give more weight to their own opinion than they do to the other's. (2015: 38–39)

He takes this view to follow from what he calls "First-Personal Bias": "provided one has no special reason to treat oneself as less (or more) reliable than other people, one should give somewhat more weight to one's own opinions than one does to the opinions of others" (2015: 38). This view in turn follows from the combination of two other views he calls "Self-Trust" and "Testimonial Entitlement." Whereas according to the first, "each normal individual is entitled, from the beginning of inquiry, to rely on her own basic belief-forming faculties, at least to some degree," according to the second, "our entitlement or obligation to rely on the beliefs and belief-forming faculties of others is derivative from the evidence generated by compliance with this first entitlement [i.e., Self-Trust]" (2015: 27).[26] I may be missing something here, but I confess not to understand how Schafer's awareness of the symmetry postulated by the Rational Symmetry View does not undermine his confidence in his beliefs about controversial issues. Whereas he takes that view to show us a way to resolve disagreements from the first-person perspective, by my lights it actually shows, once we become aware of the symmetry in question, that it does not seem possible to resolve disagreements from the first-person perspective in a non-arbitrary way. For Schafer's view tells us that each party to a disagreement is entitled, absent a special reason to the contrary, to somewhat privilege their own opinion over their rival's; and if from my own first-person perspective I come to realize that that is indeed the case, I need to find a symmetry breaker that enables me to justifiably believe that I am the one who got things right. Self-trust will not do the trick, for if at most one of the disagreeing parties may be correct, then self-trust does not prevent at least one of them from getting things wrong: my rival got things wrong despite his trusting his own opinions, or I did despite my trusting my own opinions, or maybe both did despite trusting our respective opinions. Thus, from my own first-person perspective, I become aware both that my opponent is, just as I am, entitled to trust his own opinions unless there is a special reason not to do so, and that one

[26] Schafer (2015: 29, 39) thinks that his argument works even if Testimonial Entitlement is replaced with the weaker claim that the basic level of confidence that we are entitled to have in others is not as high as that which we are entitled to have in ourselves.

may be wrong despite relying on self-trust. If this is so, then I may be unable to eliminate entirely the first-person perspective and unable not to rely on self-trust when making decisions particularly about practical matters—which may give us a pragmatic reason to adopt an attitude of trust towards our own faculties—but I may still be able, from my own first-person perspective, to call into question self-trust as a reliable source of knowledge or justification. Ineliminablility entails neither infallibility nor reliability: the fact that we cannot but use our cognitive faculties when inquiring does not entail that these faculties are either infallible or reliable, or that they are less fallible or more reliable than the cognitive faculties of our opponents. For instance, I may be unable not to rely on my memory, but this does not entail that it is infallible or reliable, or that it is less fallible or more reliable than my opponent's. In fact, as we will see in Chap. 8, there seems to be ample empirical evidence that our cognitive faculties are much less reliable than we think. The neo-Pyrrhonist could even argue that self-trust might be self-defeating insofar as, if one trusts the results of certain studies that one has conducted using one's own cognitive faculties, then one has to accept that such faculties are not reliable. Perhaps reason contains the seeds of its own destruction inasmuch as, in certain situations, it might defeat or undermine itself.

My third remark about Enoch's view is related to the preceding one: even if the first-person vantage point is ineliminable, this ineliminability does not prevent one from exercising radical self-criticism, as I am doing now, and so one can refrain from trusting one's cognitive faculties.[27] It might be objected that, in so doing, one is still trusting one's beliefs—generated by one's cognitive faculties—about what attitude should be adopted when confronted with the question of whether one can stick to one's guns in the face of disagreement by appealing to the ineliminable first-person perspective. One's view is therefore self-defeating. In reply, note, first, that the neo-Pyrrhonist accepts, as we saw in Chap. 5, that he is endowed with cognitive faculties and that he makes use of them, but also remarks that he remains—for the time being at least—doxastically detached from the results of the exercise of those faculties. He may employ them to see where they lead him because he does not deny their reliability, but rather suspends judgment about whether they are reliable. Second, the neo-Pyrrhonist does not assert that one is rationally required to suspend judgment when confronted with the above question, but only reports that, as a matter of fact, he finds himself in a state of suspension. Of course, other people (Enoch for one) do not react in the same way, i.e., do not suspend judgment. But, once again, this not a problem for the neo-Pyrrhonist because he does not intend to prescribe how people should react—he may at most point out how it seems people should react according to the rational requirements they themselves endorse.[28]

[27] I do not therefore share Foley's (2001: 4, 27) optimism that there is a certain degree of self-trust in one's beliefs and faculties that is appropriate or epistemically rational to have, thereby making us invulnerable to intellectual self-criticism.

[28] Foley considers the line of argument according to which radical skepticism is self-referentially incoherent inasmuch as, in raising doubts about the reliability of our intellectual faculties, procedures, and methods, the radical skeptic makes use of them, thereby presupposing their general

My last remark about Enoch's view is that the fact that some epistemic standards are high does not by itself imply that they are incorrect, and so if they lead us to skepticism and we consider skepticism to be threatening to our intellectual goals, then we must look for compelling reasons to reject skepticism instead of simply dismissing it out of hand. The same disparaging attitude towards skepticism is found in Enoch's discussion of Elga's objection that steadfast views on peer disagreement are subject to the problem of bootstrapping (2007: 486–488). Enoch recognizes that his own view cannot escape this objection but, instead of regarding this as a serious predicament, he claims that such an objection shows that the connection between the EWV and skepticism is more intimate than often noticed.[29] The reason is that the bootstrapping objection is a particular instance of the problem of easy knowledge. The EWV is thus ultimately based on assumptions that lead to skepticism, in which case this view "is—even worse than false—quite uninteresting" (2010: 991–992). Unfortunately, Enoch does not explain why skepticism is uninteresting and not worthy of careful consideration, and so I take it that he believes this is an obvious fact. However, those of us who think that skeptical arguments pose serious epistemological challenges do expect more than bare assertions. We expect elaborate anti-skeptical strategies that show how such arguments can be refuted. Enoch himself seems to recognize that the challenges posed by skepticism are more serious than he would like to admit when he points out that, "even if I do not know how exactly to solve [the bootstrapping problem], I think I can be reasonably confident that (if scepticism can be avoided) it *can* be solved" (2010: 992). I assume that this last conditional clause (even if parenthetical) is some sort of acknowledgment that skepticism is a stance that needs to be taken seriously, and so that cannot be arbitrarily ignored.

I would like to conclude this section by addressing the following objection: my arguments against Kelly and Enoch rely on both a dialectical conception of evidence (DCE) and a dialectical conception of justification (DCJ), and since these are highly dubious epistemological views, the arguments lose much of their force and appeal. According to DCE, in order for something to be genuine evidence for one's belief that p, it must be citable evidence that could persuade one's opponent of the truth of p. The problem with this view is that it is perfectly possible to have justifying evidence for one's beliefs even if one is unable to provide potentially persuasive evidence. According to DCJ, one's belief that p is epistemically justified if and only

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reliability. Although Foley is concerned with the kind of radical skepticism that is based on skeptical hypotheses and although I do not know whether he is familiar with Pyrrhonian skepticism, his reply to that line of argument would be an accurate description of the neo-Pyrrhonist's approach: "[that line of argument] fails to appreciate that the strategy of skeptics can be wholly negative, having the form of a reductio. Skeptics can conditionally assume, for the sake of argument, that our faculties, procedures, and methods are reliable and then try to illustrate that if employed rigorously enough, these same faculties, procedures, and methods generate evidence of their own unreliability and hence undermine themselves. Skeptics may or may not be right in making this charge, but there is nothing self-referentially incoherent about it" (2001: 7).

[29] One of the charges usually leveled against conciliationism more generally is that it ultimately leads to skepticism. See Machuca (2015).

if, when challenged, one can defend it by offering potentially persuasive reasons for it. Here again, the problem is that one might be justified in believing that *p* even if one is unable to provide the challenger with such reasons.[30] Given that the two conceptions in question are highly questionable, the objection goes, the skeptical arguments offered in the present section might at most show that there is dialectical symmetry between the disagreeing peers, but not epistemic symmetry.

Several remarks are in order. First, as noted in Sect. 6.1, the neo-Pyrrhonist is not committed to the soundness of the arguments he advances against his rivals. His chameleonic argumentative practice is characterized by the use of whatever arguments enable him to test the views he happens to be considering. For this reason, he may well construct arguments that appeal to DCE and DCJ to see if they are as strong as those advanced in support of the views under examination.

Second, although DCE and DCJ are rejected by some epistemologists, they also have their supporters. Far from being a problem for the neo-Pyrrhonist, this second-order disagreement is grist for his skeptical mill, as it shows how intractable disagreement keeps re-emerging. That is, when faced with the claim that DCE and DCJ are dubious or mistaken, he points out that seemingly intelligent and well-informed epistemologists believe them to be the correct conceptions of evidence and justification, and that it is unclear how this second-order disagreement can be resolved in a non-question-begging manner.

Third, in Sect. 6.1, I mentioned three ways in which a disagreement can be deemed to be resolved: (i) the parties reach consensus on the disputed matter, (ii) from a first-person perspective one comes to the conclusion that one's belief is the one best supported by the available evidence, (iii) an uninvolved observer believes that the reasons adduced by the disputants have enabled him to come to know the truth about the disputed matter. Although the arguments that appeal to DCE and DCJ create problems only for (i) and (iii), my discussion of whether one can resolve a peer disagreement from the first-person perspective was intended to show that there are also arguments that create problems for (ii). Hence, my arguments do not rely exclusively on DCE and DCJ. At this point, someone might object that one's belief may be epistemically justified even though one is unable to cite the reasons that ground that belief not only to others but also to oneself (Sosa, 2010: 295–296). Moreover, it could be objected that my discussion of the first-person perspective relies on access internalism and that this is a version of DCE or DCJ. For in one's own head one could play the role of a potential opponent and challenge one's belief by asking for citable evidence or reasons (cf. Williamson, 2007: 238). In reply, I will repeat a point already made in Chap. 4: the partial or total inaccessibility to the evidence or reasons that in principle support one's beliefs should be more disturbing than usually recognized inasmuch as this means that one cannot determine whether one's grounds for holding a given belief are rationally grounded considerations or rather epistemically irrelevant factors that distort or cloud one's judgments. Being

[30] DCE and DCJ might be taken to ultimately amount to the same position, but I will treat them as two different positions.

aware of how limited one's self-knowledge is should make one wonder whether one can legitimately privilege one's own belief about the disputed matter over the belief of one's rival.

6.6 Conclusion

Let me summarize the main points of this chapter. First, both conciliationist and steadfast views on peer disagreement illegitimately take for granted the truth of factualism, i.e., that there is a fact of the matter about most disputed issues. Second, even if one grants for the sake of argument that there are objective facts, one faces the problem that there are long-standing disagreements about what evidence is or what sorts of things can count as evidence. Third, even if one concedes that there is consensus about those issues, one cannot rule out without argument the possibility that what we regard as the evidence bearing on the contested matter is theory-laden, so that any report of a piece of evidence already presupposes a given theory in reference to which what we call evidence is described and assessed. Fourth, even if one concedes that there is such a thing as objective evidence, the very existence of enduring peer disagreements should make us wonder whether we can have access to the truth of the matter about the disputed issues on the basis of the available evidence. For instance, one cannot rule out without argument the possibility that the total available evidence bearing on the contested matter underdetermines the choice between the competing views. Fifth, it is far from clear that we can non-question-beggingly determine that, on a given occasion, one of the disagreeing peers has correctly responded to the first-order evidence. There is a dialectical symmetry with epistemic implications in the kind of arguments and considerations that each of the disputants can put forth in favor of their own view, including the appeal to the ineliminability of the first-person perspective and the self-trust that comes with it.

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Chapter 7
Personal Information as Symmetry Breaker

Abstract Some epistemologists maintain that, in the face of many disagreements, one can legitimately stick to one's guns by relying, at least in part, on introspectively acquired information about one's own mental states and the normal functioning of one's own cognitive capacities. In the present chapter, I argue that appealing to such personal or private information is not an effective strategy for resolving disagreements from a first-person viewpoint. I also argue that, even if one grants for the sake of argument that personal information is accurate, when it comes to real-life rather than idealized disagreements, awareness of the partial or total lack of information about one's opponent's evidence, cognitive capacities, and performance gives one a reason to doubt that personal information can function as a symmetry breaker.

Keywords Dialectical symmetry · Epistemic symmetry · Externalism · Idealized disagreement · Personal information · Real-life disagreement · Unpossessed information

7.1 Introduction

When involved in a disagreement, a common reaction is to tell oneself that one has abundant and accurate information about one's own mental states, cognitive capacities, track record, or performance in evaluating the evidence bearing on the matter at hand. By contrast, the information one possesses about one's opponent is clearly inferior in both amount and quality. Thus, from a first-person perspective, it seems that one can resolve many of the disagreements in which one is involved, even if one cannot expect that from a third-person perspective an uninvolved observer would be able to decide which of the parties is right. In line with this common reaction to disagreement, some epistemologists maintain that, in the face of many disputes, one can legitimately stick to one's guns by relying, at least in part, on introspectively acquired information about one's own mental states and the normal functioning of one's own cognitive capacities. In this chapter, I argue that appealing to such personal or private information is not an effective strategy for resolving disagreements

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from a first-person viewpoint. In the next chapter, I will strengthen my case by focusing on experimental studies that provide evidence that we do not know ourselves as well as we think we do.

In Sect. 7.2, I critically examine the view according to which we have enough information about ourselves to make an accurate assessment of our own epistemic standing, and hence to decide whether, when confronted with a disagreement, we can justifiably privilege our own opinion on the disputed matter over that of our opponent. I argue, first, that there seems to be a dialectical-cum-epistemic parity between the disputants inasmuch as they can both appeal to personal information as a symmetry breaker; and second, that awareness of our limited access to the evidence and reasons on the basis of which our beliefs are formed should make us entertain the possibility that at least many of our beliefs are the product of epistemically distorting factors. I also express reservations about the appeal to epistemic externalism in the context of disagreement. In Sect. 7.3, I claim that, even if one focuses on real-life disagreements and even if it is granted for argument's sake that personal information is accurate, awareness of the partial or total lack of information about one's opponent's evidence, cognitive capacities, and performance gives one a reason to doubt that personal information can function as a symmetry breaker. In Sect. 7.4, I offer some concluding remarks.

7.2 Personal Information and High Degree of Justified Confidence

One of the reasons on which some authors base their rejection of conciliationism is the asymmetry between the information one possesses about one's epistemic situation and the information one possesses about the epistemic situation of one's rival. The abundant and accurate information one has about one's own mental states and the normal functioning of one's own cognitive capacities enables one to avoid engaging in doxastic revision in many or most cases of disagreement. This position is related to the view, discussed in the preceding chapter, that appeals to the first-person perspective and the self-trust that comes with it to show that, in the face of many or most disagreements, one can legitimately privilege one's own belief about the disputed matter over that of one's rival. The problems it faces are somewhat similar.

Ernest Sosa (2010) rejects the principle of Independence because, among other reasons, it cannot properly be applied to the disagreements in which the evidence is the phenomenal or the rational given, since in these disagreements it is legitimate to downgrade one's opponent's ability to correctly assess the evidence by appealing to the substance of the disagreement, even when one has no independent reason to do so. Sosa remarks that such cases are not relevant to the epistemological problem posed by disagreement because the correctness of one of the sides is so obvious that no further reason in its favor is required and, hence, there is no real dispute. I will,

however, consider the example he gives of a disagreement concerning the phenomenal given because it illustrates the personal and social facets of disagreement, and particularly our introspective access to our own mental states:

> Suppose you have a headache. What reason do you have for thinking that you do? The important reason is, quite plausibly, simply *that* you do! Is this a reason that enables you reasonably to sustain your side of a disagreement when an employer believes you to be a malingering faker, with no headache at all? If so, then you can after all demote an opponent by relying on the substance of your disagreement. A huge part of your reason for rejecting the employer's claim that you're faking it is the very fact that gives content to your belief, the fact of the headache itself. Here then one has a conclusive reason that makes one's belief a certainty, even if that reason will be useless in a public dispute. It will not much advance your cause to just assert against your employer that you *do* have a headache, even if this is in fact the reason that makes you certain that you do. (Sosa, 2010: 286)

If I say that I have a terrible headache and ask my boss to let me leave early from work, but he replies that I do not really have a headache or that he is not sure that I do, then for me the dispute is immediately settled because I know that I have a headache. But it is not settled publicly, since my boss may have reasons to suspect: he knows that I have lied in the past, someone whom he trusts has told him that I am lying, or he may have doubts about the reliability of people's testimony in general. Nor is the dispute easily settled from the viewpoint of an external observer, since he needs to assess both the reasons put forward by the person who claims to have a headache and those given by the one who distrusts that person's testimony. The fact that the dispute is not settled from a social or public point of view has of course important practical consequences, since I may not get the permission to leave and, if I nonetheless leave, I may get fired. As was pointed out in the previous chapter, whether a disagreement has been resolved will at least often depend on whether we are considering the personal or the public standpoint from which the disagreement is looked at. For present purposes, what is of particular interest about the quoted passage is the fact that Sosa seems to rely on the view that, at least in normal circumstances or in the case of "any obstreperous enough mental state" (2010: 286), we cannot be mistaken about our own ongoing conscious phenomenology, which is precisely what enables us to readily resolve certain disagreements. There are mental states about which our information is accurate inasmuch as we have access to them through a reliable introspective process. However, as we will see in the next chapter, it is far from clear that we are entitled to regard ourselves as reliable judges of our own stream of conscious experience, even in circumstances we consider normal or regarding mental states we deem transparent.

According to Sosa, even in the face of disagreements that cannot be readily resolved, I can legitimately hold my ground and dismiss my opponent's opinion when I have different degrees of confidence in the reliability of the competence I exercise and in the reliability of the competence my opponent exercises. Referring to those who disagree about highly controversial issues, Sosa points out:

> None of them is privy to the backing for their opponents' contrary belief, *not fully*. Yet each might be quite reasonably confident of the competence they themselves exercise, or at least each may have no sufficient independent basis for thinking the other to be a relevant peer.

> And this is why they might properly downgrade their opponents based essentially on the substance of their disagreement. (2010: 295)

Setting aside the possibility that each party's high degree of confidence in the reliability of the competence they exercise may be unwarranted given the limits of self-knowledge, the fact that both offer the same reason for privileging their own opinion on the disputed matter over that of their rival calls for suspension of judgment—or so it appears to me. Consider, first, that from the vantage point of an external observer who cannot form an opinion on the disputed matter unless the parties reach consensus, the disagreement cannot be resolved because both claim to be reasonably sure that the competence they exercise is reliable and to lack independent reasons to regard their rival as an epistemic peer on the matter at hand. But second, and more importantly, if each party follows Sosa's line of reasoning and comes to the conclusion that they are both reasonable in holding their ground and dismissing their rival's opinion, should this not lead them to suspend judgment? For if I dismiss my rival's opinion because I am not equally confident in the reliability of the competence I exercise and in the reliability of the competence he exercises, I then learn that he dismisses my opinion for the same reason, and I believe that at most one of us can be right, what is so special about myself that I can simply exclude the possibility that it is my confidence in the reliability of the competence I exercise that is unwarranted? If my rival can be wrong despite his high level of confidence in the reliability of the competence he exercises, why can I not be wrong despite my high level of confidence in the reliability of the competence I exercise? It seems to me that if, when analyzing things from my own first-person perspective, I incorporate information about the way my rival sees things from his own first-person perspective, I may gain a reason to significantly lower my confidence in the truth of my belief about the matter under dispute. There is a dialectical symmetry between the disputants that has epistemic implications: learning that the strategy my rival follows for resolving the disagreement from his own first-person perspective is the very same strategy I follow for resolving the disagreement from my own first-person perspective should make me wonder whether the strategy in question is as reliable as I think it is. I will find further reasons to call into question such a strategy if, in my analysis of the disagreement from a first-person vantage point, I incorporate as well empirical evidence to the effect that we do not actually know much about the reasons for our beliefs and choices—an issue that will be tackled in the next chapter. Thus, to one's first-order evidence about the disputed matter, one would then have to add the higher-order evidence consisting in the fact of the disagreement, the dialectical-cum-epistemic symmetry between the disputants, and the empirical findings provided by experimental research. When one incorporates such additional information, suspension seems called for.

It is worth noting that Sosa is aware of the fact that, just as I have incomplete access to my opponent's evidence and reasons, so too do I have partial access to the evidence and reasons on the basis of which my beliefs are formed. He observes that hardly ever do we have reflective access to the total evidence on the basis of which we form our beliefs, since much of that evidence was acquired by means of various

sources, is hidden in the past, and can only be retrieved through retentive memory (cf. Lackey, 2010: 312). If so, full disclosure is not possible. Consider the following passages:

> Moore's reasoning suggests a way to handle disagreements commonly encountered in fields where controversy abounds. In Moore's case we are unsure of having fully expounded our evidence. Normal cases of deep, important controversy share relevant features that make this comparison interesting. The evidence on which we base belief in our side of a controversy need only be inscrutable, for whatever reason, or at least sufficiently hard to uncover. For it cannot then be displayed for reflection on how well it supports the content of our belief. (Sosa, 2010: 290)

> If we can't spot our operative evidence […] then we cannot disclose it, so as to share it. And this will apply to our opinions on complex and controversial topics no less than to our belief about our teacher's name or the touchiness of our friend or the stars in the sky. […] We have reasons […] that, acting in concert, across time, have motivated our present beliefs, but we are in no position to detail these reasons fully. This may be so, finally, as Moore also thought, even in cases where the reasons are in combination quite conclusive. (2010: 291)

Even though I agree with Sosa about how much of the evidence and reasons on which we base our beliefs appears to be beyond our ken, I cannot see how awareness of that fact does not lead us to take a skeptical stance, unless we have an extraordinarily strong faith in the reliability of our cognitive processes. Our ignorance of the sources of our beliefs is so extensive that, to my mind, epistemologists should be much more worried about the possibility that at least many of our beliefs are the product of epistemically distorting factors. This possibility is by itself serious enough to raise a skeptical challenge, but as we will see in the next chapter, there appears to be abundant empirical evidence that it is not a mere possibility but a common phenomenon, which renders the challenge more pressing. Sosa does not share my worries, though. À la Moore, he maintains:

> Our inability to defeat an opponent in public debate need not rationally require us to abandon our beliefs. For various powerful reasons, our beliefs can be grounded adequately in reasons that give us no dialectical advantage, either because they offer no dialectically persuasive leverage, or because they are undisclosably beyond our reach. While appealing to this fact, finally, we must avoid a dispiriting obscurantism, but we need to recognize also that it *is* a fact […]. (2010: 295–296)

Sosa defines the obscurantism in question as the "position that our reasons, far removed in our past, or deeply lodged in our subconscious, cannot be uncovered for critical inspection" (2010: 291–292). Despite his exhortation not to fall into such a position, it seems to be precisely the one that accurately describes the fact he asks us to recognize. Be that as it may, in the next chapter, we will see that experimental studies provide us with evidence that seems to indicate that a great deal of our reasons cannot be disclosed for critical scrutiny. Now, in the kind of disagreement Sosa has in mind, the correctness of the position one advocates is not obvious, so that one needs further reasons, which nonetheless one cannot (fully) disclose. However, he claims that, even though one cannot fully explain those reasons either to others or to oneself, one's position is adequately grounded in them. Dialectical ineffectiveness may have important practical effects, but this by itself does not undermine the

epistemic justification of one's belief unless one adopts a dialectical conception of justification. Though I think that, in certain contexts such as the philosophical arena, one is expected to be able to articulate one's reasons, given my neo-Pyrrhonian stance, I have no strong preference for any conception of justification. What I do find problematic, and surprising, about Sosa's position is that he does not seem to realize that our dramatically limited access to the sources of our beliefs and the processes that lie behind our belief-formation should make us wonder about the epistemic credentials of our own beliefs. At least in many disagreements, such a cognitive limitation should undermine one's preference for one's own position over that of one's rival for the simple reason that—as already noted in Chap. 4—one cannot determine whether one's reasons for presently holding certain beliefs are rationally grounded considerations or rather prejudices, one's blind acceptance of authority, certain past pleasant or unpleasant experiences, one's current emotional states, or some other epistemically irrelevant factor. Our ignorance of the actual origins of at least a considerable number of our beliefs results in our taking those beliefs to have epistemic credentials that either they lack or we have so far no evidence they have. For example, as Sosa correctly remarks, to retrieve much of our evidence we rely on the operation of memory. The problem is that experimental studies on confabulation and eyewitness testimony provide abundant evidence that memory is a constructive process rather than simply a passively recording process (more on this in the next chapter). This means that, in at least a considerable number of cases, the events we remember are drastically distorted or manipulated, and that we create stories that help us make sense of our attitudes and our lives.

Jennifer Lackey (2010), too, emphasizes that the asymmetry between the information one possesses about one's own epistemic situation and the information one possesses about the epistemic situation of one's rival is a key part of the strategy that enables one to hold one's ground in the face of many real-life disagreements.[1] I will focus on two of her imaginary cases of real-life disagreement. In the first, she disagrees with her friend Edwin about whether their roommate Estelle is eating lunch with them at the dining room table in their apartment (Lackey, 2010: 306–307). She first remarks that, if one considers the situation from her own perspective, then not only does it clearly seem to her that her friend is present at the table, but she has never in her life hallucinated an object, she has not been drinking or taking drugs, she has her contact lenses in, her eyesight functions reliably when her nearsightedness is corrected, and she knows all of this to be true of herself. As a result, even if prior to the disagreement she had good reason to consider Edwin an epistemic peer, it is rational for her to continue to believe that her friend is sitting at the table. She then adds that, given the extraordinarily high degree of justified confidence with which she holds her belief about Estelle's presence at the table, the fact that Edwin disagrees with her is best taken as evidence that something has gone wrong with him. It thus seems that, in the toy case under consideration, Lackey takes the high

[1] Christensen (2009: 759–760; 2011: 9–10), Frances (2010: 441–442), and Matheson (2015: 103–104, 118, 121–122), too, maintain that, in real-life disagreements, personal information can sometimes function as a symmetry breaker.

degree of justified confidence with which she holds her belief to rest, at least in part, on both her introspective access to her current phenomenologically vivid experience and her knowledge about the past and present normal functioning of her cognitive faculties. More succinctly, it seems that it is what she knows about her own epistemic situation that enables her to claim that her high degree of confidence is justified.

In the second imaginary case, she disagrees with a long-time neighbor, Jack, about the location of a Chicago restaurant the two of them frequent (Lackey, 2010: 308–309). Although prior to the disagreement neither of them had any reason to suspect that the other's memory was in any way deficient and they viewed each other as epistemic peers regarding knowledge of the city, she claims that she can retain her belief about the restaurant's location with the same high degree of justified confidence she had before the disagreement occurred. For she has lived in the city for many years, knows the city extremely well, has eaten at the restaurant many times, has not been drinking or taking drugs, has ample evidence that her memory is functioning reliably, and knows all of this to be true of herself. She then adds that, given the substantial amount of credence and epistemic support enjoyed by her belief, it is clear that her neighbor's disagreement is evidence that something is wrong with him: he may have been drinking, or be delusional, or be suffering from some kind of memory loss. Once again, it seems that, in the toy case in question, one's high degree of justified confidence in one's belief rests, at least in part, on the information one has about one's epistemic situation. However, Lackey (2010: 309) actually regards these as two different conditions that must be met together to function as a symmetry breaker. Thus, the key to avoiding the need to engage in doxastic revision in the face of peer disagreement lies both in the fact that one usually has information about oneself that one lacks about one's rival and in the fact that one's high degree of confidence in one's own belief is justified.

With respect to the first condition, it should be emphasized that the information one has about oneself is, as noted above, much more limited and inaccurate than one might like to think. It is therefore not clear that, in Lackey's toy cases, one can justifiably affirm that one has never hallucinated, that one is not being delusional, or that one is not suffering from some kind of memory loss. Moreover, both our own experience and the psychological literature teach us that people suffering from delusion or mnemonic confabulation are unaware of it. This is precisely what happens in the perception and the restaurant cases, since one's rival is highly confident in his belief about the absence of one's friend at the dining room table and in his belief about the location of the restaurant, even though one thinks that there is definitely something wrong with him. Now, if one can entertain the possibility that something has gone awry with one's opponent and that he is unaware of it, why can one not entertain the possibility that the same has happened to one? Note also that, as already observed when examining Sosa's position, there seems to be a symmetry between the disputants that is dialectical but that has epistemic implications: just as I can appeal to the information I possess about myself to dismiss my opponent's belief about the disputed matter, so too can he appeal to the information he possesses about himself to dismiss my belief about it. This symmetry can be

appreciated not only from a third-person perspective but also from a first-person perspective, for each disputant may become aware that both claim to have access to accurate personal information and that both reason in the same way in dismissing their rival's opinion. Such awareness is part of each party's total available evidence and might contribute to their adopting a humble and conciliatory stance. For it might make them realize that the appeal to personal information is not actually an effective strategy for resolving disagreements inasmuch as one might be deeply wrong despite relying on such information.

What about the second condition mentioned by Lackey, i.e., the high degree of justified confidence in one's belief? The first thing to point out is that both disputants may have a high degree of confidence in their respective beliefs, so that we must find a non-question-begging way to determine which party is in fact justified in having such a degree of confidence. Here Lackey 'goes externalist'. Regarding the disagreement about whether Estelle is at the dining room table with her and Edwin, she invites us to suppose that Edwin denies Estelle's presence at the table because he is hallucinating, and that his hallucination is caused by the fact that, unbeknownst to him, he was drugged by a friend. Edwin cannot realize that he is hallucinating because the drug produces no discernible signs. Lackey then argues that, although she is happy to grant that, from a purely subjective point of view, Edwin is as reasonable in his belief as she is in hers, their beliefs are not equally justified inasmuch as they are not produced by processes that are equally reliable or truth-conducive: in her case the belief is the result of a veridical perceptual experience, while in Edwin's case the belief is the result of a hallucination (Lackey, 2010: 320). I confess that I do not see how externalism is useful to disputants who want to find a non-question-begging way to resolve the disagreement in which they are involved. Even if from the vantage point of an external observer who is fully informed about the situation it is possible to determine which of the conflicting beliefs was produced by a reliable or truth-conducive process, this is much more difficult from the vantage point of the disputants themselves. I may claim that my belief was caused by a reliable or truth-conducive mechanism, but so too may my opponent. In order to legitimately affirm that he is hallucinating while my belief is the result of a veridical perceptual experience, it seems that I need to offer, not only to my disputant but also to myself, reasons for claiming that I am not the one who has unknowingly taken a drug that produces no noticeable signs. If so, then, in order to resolve the disagreement, one needs reasons for claiming that the cognitive process that caused one's belief is reliable or truth-conducive, and to have such reasons one needs to have some sort of access to that process. If I were to say that my belief about whether *p* is correct because it was formed by a reliable belief-forming process and that unfortunately my rival's belief about whether *p* was formed by one that is unreliable, he would most probably retort that it is his belief about whether *p* that has been produced by a reliable belief-forming process and that unfortunately mine was produced by one that is unreliable. How should one react? One might well say: "Unfortunately, my rival doesn't realize that in this case his belief has not been reliably produced, and hence that he's gotten things wrong." Alternatively, one might say: "If it is possible that he has gotten it wrong but can't see it and believes instead

that his belief has been formed by properly functioning faculties, what's so special about myself that the same can't be happening to me?" It seems that one needs to know not only that certain cognitive processes are reliable, but also that in the specific situation in which one finds oneself one's belief is indeed the result of one or more of those processes. If disagreement poses a challenge the disputants need to meet in a way they regard as responsible and non-arbitrary, then externalism does not seem to be up to the task.[2]

Before moving on to the next section, let me say something else about epistemic externalism. The endorsement of this view sometimes strikes me as a desperate move motivated by the desire to avoid radical skepticism at all costs. Upon writing the previous sentence, I remembered the title of an article by James van Cleve: "Is Knowledge Easy—or Impossible? Externalism as the Only Alternative to Skepticism" (2003). Therein van Cleve proposes to defend the kind of epistemic externalism he endorsed in earlier writings, according to which it is possible to obtain knowledge of the reliability of one's cognitive faculties by using those very faculties and there is nothing objectionably circular in such a procedure. Van Cleve is responding to the criticisms leveled against externalism mainly by Fumerton (1995), Vogel (2000), and Cohen (2002), who maintain that externalists, by endorsing so-called bootstrapping, make the acquisition of knowledge too easy.[3] In the opening paragraph of the article, van Cleve remarks:

> In what follows I press the suggestion that the only alternative to such externalism may be skepticism. If correct, this is a significant result, for those who object to the circularity sanctioned by externalism do not generally wish to embrace skepticism. More typically, they believe that there is some third alternative to the easy knowledge of the externalist and the unattainable knowledge of the skeptic. But the existence of any such third way is precisely what I shall question. (2003: 45)

So, either you accept that acquiring knowledge may not be that hard after all, or else good luck with skepticism. Particularly over the past few years, several epistemologists, both externalists and internalists, have defended the view that certain sorts of

[2] Absent some reason for claiming that one's belief has been produced by a reliable process, one's situation would be similar to that in which those engaged in philosophical investigation find themselves according to Sextus. He compares them both to those who look for gold in a dark room full of treasures and to those who shoot at some target in the dark. In the former case, even though each of them thinks that he has taken hold of the gold upon grasping one of the objects, none of them will be sure that he has hit upon the gold even if he in fact has (*AD* I 52). In the latter case, even though it is likely that one of them has hit the target and another has missed it, it is unknown who has hit it and who has missed it (*AD* II 325). In referring to these Sextan similes, I do not mean that Sextus would reject epistemic externalism or endorse epistemic internalism. Rather, my point is simply that those similes make one wonder whether epistemic externalism makes sense for someone who is engaged in truth-directed investigation and wants to know whether he has made a discovery. For discussion of Sextus's stance on epistemic externalism and internalism, see Barnes (1990: 138–144) and Bueno (2011).

[3] On the problem of easy knowledge and epistemic bootstrapping, see also Cohen (2005, 2010) and Vogel (2008).

circular reasoning are acceptable or that there is a type of circularity that is benign.[4] Brian Weatherson has recently remarked that he and other epistemologists who accept circularity agree "that otherwise plausible anti-circularity principles lead to intolerably skeptical conclusions" (2019: 154). The acceptance of circularity of a certain kind strikes me as an unwilling recognition of the inability to come up with a successful refutation of skepticism about the reliability of our cognitive faculties. The thought is that we had better accept that circular reasoning is sometimes benign if we want to avoid falling into some form of radical skepticism, such as Pyrrhonism. Now, it could be argued, as Weatherson does, that Pyrrhonian skeptics "reach […] implausibly skeptical conclusions" (2019: 154) because they are "global conservatives" (2019: 154, 156) who claim that, for any method *M*, "S gets a justified belief in *p* only if she antecedently has a justified belief that *M works*" (2019: 150). Of course, a neo-Pyrrhonist would not affirm that conservatism is correct, and so would reject the claim that he is a global conservative. As noted in previous chapters, he works with the assumptions of his opponents. But would this not mean that his argument will be ineffective against those who reject conservatism? The neo-Pyrrhonist would remark, first, that they seem to reject conservatism not so much because they have shown that it is incorrect as because the skepticism that would result from it has consequences they deem appalling. Second, he would stress the fact that there is a disagreement between advocates and opponents of conservatism that, insofar as it remains unresolved, should perhaps lead them, according to their own rational requirements, to suspend judgment about whether one can get a justified belief in *p* only if one antecedently has a justified belief that the method used to get that belief works.

7.3 Real-Life Disputes and Unpossessed Information

As noted in Chap. 6, the notion of epistemic peerhood is sometimes understood as implying perfect epistemic parity or equality between the disputants. As some authors have emphasized, such a way of framing the discussion of the epistemic significance of peer disagreement faces the problem that, given that it is artificial or idealized, the conclusions arrived at in that discussion cannot be carried over to real-world controversies—which are (or should be) those we are interested in resolving.[5] Indeed, may two individuals be perfect epistemic peers? That is, may they both be fully acquainted with all the same available evidence bearing on the disputed matter and possess the same cognitive skills or virtues? It seems that the only reasonable answer is an emphatic "no." But even if the answer is "yes" and there exist epistemic peers, is it possible to determine that any two individuals are epistemic peers

[4] See, e.g., Alston (1989), Bergmann (2004), Alexander (2011), Steup (2013, 2019), Barnett (2014), and Weatherson (2019: chap. 9).

[5] See, e.g., Frances (2010: 424–425), Lackey (2010: 303–305), King (2012: 251–266; 2013: 199–201), and Sherman (2015: 426–428).

so that one can legitimately talk about a peer disagreement that is acknowledged to be so by the disputants? It does not seem very likely. Alternatively, even though two individuals differ in one or both of the above respects, may they both be, on the whole, equally good at evaluating the matter under consideration? This seems more likely, but I am unsure whether two individuals can be equally good at evaluating a given matter. But granting that there exist epistemic peers in this less stringent sense, is it possible to determine that any two individuals are such that one can legitimately talk about a peer disagreement (again, in a less stringent sense) that is acknowledged to be so by the disputants? Though this seems, once again, more likely than determining that two individuals are equals in the two respects mentioned above, doing so is no easy task when it comes to real-life situations.

If we tend to reply to the foregoing questions in the negative, then it seems that we must conclude that conciliationism could at most be a position one should embrace in the face of a kind of disagreement—acknowledged peer disagreement—that is merely fictional. However, even if we set acknowledged peer disagreement aside and focus instead on actual controversies with all their complexities, skepticism is not out of the picture, but becomes even more threatening. Notice, first, that even if it were granted for the sake of argument that reliable self-assessment is possible because our self-knowledge is extensive and mostly accurate, one's partial or total lack of information about one's opponent's evidence, the reliability (or lack thereof) of his cognitive capacities, and the functioning of these capacities in the specific circumstance of the disagreement poses a serious problem of its own. For this means that we are in the dark about information that must be taken into consideration when deciding what to believe about the disputed matter, and hence that it is no easy task to determine which of the disputants is in a better epistemic position with regard to that matter.[6] My partial or total ignorance of my opponent's epistemic situation should make me wonder whether he may not possess relevant evidence that I lack, whether he may not have higher cognitive abilities, or whether he may not be employing his cognitive abilities to assess the disputed matter better than I am employing mine.[7] To my mind, none of these possibilities can be easily excluded, at least in many cases of disagreement. If so, then it might be argued that one should refrain from affirming that, when involved in a disagreement, one can often legitimately downgrade one's opponent on the basis of one's personal information despite one's partial or complete ignorance of his epistemic standing. To appreciate this, try

[6] A similar point is made by King (2012: 251, 267).

[7] Here it is useful to keep in mind the influence of the rule that psychologist Daniel Kahneman (2011) calls WYSATI (what you see is all there is), which refers to our tendency to jump to conclusions or make judgments on the basis of limited evidence: "You cannot help dealing with the limited information you have as if it were all there is to know. You build the best possible story from the information available to you, and if it is a good story, you believe it. Paradoxically, it is easier to construct a coherent story when you know little, when there are fewer pieces to fit into the puzzle. Our comforting conviction that the world makes sense rests on a secure foundation: our almost unlimited ability to ignore our ignorance" (2011: 201). It therefore seems that, in the face of disagreement, one had better remind oneself of paying attention to both available and *unpossessed* information. On this issue, see also Ballantyne (2015).

to remember those occasions in which you downgraded an opponent because of your high degree of confidence in how smart, well informed, meticulous, and objective you were in your analysis of the disputed matter, just to later realize that you were mistaken and that you should have been more open-minded and intellectually humble: your opponent turned out to be smarter or better informed or more thorough or less biased.

Second, if we accept that people know much less about their evidence, cognitive capacities, and performance than they think, then there would be even more information about which we are in the dark. It would be extremely difficult to establish with the required precision what my epistemic status is in relation to that of my rival—and it would be equally difficult for him to do so. If I cannot justifiably affirm that I am epistemically superior to my opponent, and *vice versa*, then it appears that for both suspension of judgment is called for. If so, then it is not the case that skepticism represents a real threat provided one restricts oneself to idealized disagreements, where all the epistemically relevant aspects are artificially stipulated to be perfectly symmetric.

7.4 Conclusion

It may be argued that, once we realize that epistemic peerhood understood in an idealized sense has little or nothing to do with real life, we lose one key reason to conciliate in the face of disagreement. Given that in real-life disputes we do not have as much information about our opponent as we do about ourselves, in those cases in which we have personal information that indicates that we are in a good epistemic position with respect to the disputed matter, we have a symmetry breaker that enables us to dismiss our opponent's view and stick to our own. However, first, since both disputants can have recourse to the same strategy and each disputant can be aware of this fact from his own first-person vantage point, there seems to be a dialectical-cum-epistemic symmetry between them. Second, given that we have limited access to the evidence and reasons on the basis of which our beliefs are formed, we cannot exclude the possibility that many of our beliefs are the product of epistemically contaminating factors. Third, even if one focuses on real-life disagreements and even if it is granted for argument's sake that one has accurate information about one's own epistemic standing, it seems that awareness of one's partial or total lack of information about one's opponent's evidence, cognitive abilities, or performance should undermine one's confidence in one's belief. For, without such information, it does not seem possible to decide who is in fact in a better epistemic position vis-à-vis the disputed matter. Lastly, making that decision is of course much more difficult when one lacks information not only about one's opponent's actual epistemic standing but also about one's own.

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Chapter 8
The Limits of Self-Knowledge

Abstract The aim of this chapter is to strengthen the case against the appeal to personal information as an effective strategy for resolving disagreements by considering a wide range of experimental research on overconfidence, the bias blind spot, introspection, and confabulation. Reviewing the results of that research will cause the unsettling feeling that we seem to know much less about ourselves than we think. An appendix examines whether the ancient Pyrrhonists were aware that one may be mistaken about one's own current phenomenology or rather took for granted that one has knowledge of the way one is appeared to.

Keywords Bias blind spot · Confabulation · Confirmation bias · Introspection · Dunning-Kruger effect · Memory · Overconfidence · Rustic Pyrrhonism · Expertise defense

8.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I intend to strengthen my case against the appeal to personal information as an effective strategy for resolving disagreements by considering a wide range of experimental research on overconfidence, the bias blind spot, introspection, and confabulation. Reviewing the results of that research will cause the unsettling feeling that we seem to know much less about ourselves than we think—including our cognitive abilities, our current conscious phenomenology, our past, or the actual causes of our beliefs, feelings, choices, and actions.

In Sect. 8.2, I look at studies that investigate the reliability of one's assessment of one's own cognitive capacities and performance. In Sect. 8.3, I consider the literature on the bias blind spot. In Sect. 8.4, I focus on self-knowledge acquired through introspection. In Sect. 8.5, I deal with the phenomenon of confabulation. In Sect. 8.6, I address four objections that could be raised to the neo-Pyrrhonist's use of the experimental research to be reviewed. In addressing these objections, I consider, *inter alia*, whether philosophers are capable, in virtue of their training and experience, of eliminating or mitigating the distorting influence of biases on their judgments and behavior. In Sect. 8.7, I offer some concluding remarks. In an

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Appendix, I examine whether Sextus and ancient Pyrrhonists more generally were aware that one may be mistaken about one's own current phenomenology or rather took for granted that one has knowledge of the way one is appeared to.

8.2 Overconfidence

One of the problems facing the strategy for resolving disagreements that contrasts the information one possesses about one's own epistemic situation with the information one possesses about the epistemic situation of one's rival is that it appears that people are not in general very good at assessing their own cognitive capacities and performance. To begin with, the results of a number of experimental studies indicate that we often either overestimate or underestimate our general cognitive competence and our performance in specific circumstances. This means that, in some cases of disagreement, a person might favor his side simply because he overrates his cognitive capacities or his performance in applying them to the assessment of the disputed matter, while in others he might lower his degree of confidence in his own belief simply because he underrates his cognitive capacities or his performance.

One of the most cited articles on the inaccuracy of one's assessment of one's own cognitive capacities and performance is Justin Kruger and David Dunning's "Unskilled and Unaware of It" (Kruger & Dunning, 1999). In an attempt to understand people's inflated self-assessments in many social and intellectual domains, they conducted four studies in which they tested undergraduate students on humor, grammar, and logic. They found that the individuals whom they define as "unskilled" or "incompetent"—those who scored in the bottom quarter of the distribution—grossly overestimated their overall abilities and test performance both relative to their peers and (to a lesser degree) along absolute performance measures, and that they were unaware that they had performed poorly. Kruger and Dunning remark that these individuals suffer a dual burden, since not only do they reach erroneous conclusions and make poor choices, but their incompetence deprives them of the metacognitive ability to recognize the low quality of their performance: "the skills that engender competence in a particular domain are often the very same skills necessary to evaluate competence in that domain—one's own or anyone else's" (1999: 1121). For this reason, "incompetence […] not only causes poor performance but also the inability to recognize that one's performance is poor" (1999: 1130). Given their difficulty in recognizing competence not only in themselves but also in others, they are unable to take advantage of the feedback provided by social comparison: they are unable to use information about the superior performance of others to gain insight into the true level of their own performance and then revise their view of their own competence by comparison. Although their aim was to study the overestimation of one's cognitive abilities and performance, Kruger and Dunning (1999) found along the way that skilled individuals—those who scored in the top quarter of the distribution—underestimated their cognitive abilities and test performance

relative to their peers. However, since top performers have the metacognitive ability to recognize competence in themselves and others, they are able to use information about the inferior performance of others to raise their estimates of their own performance. In a subsequent study, Kruger, Dunning, and their colleagues replicated most of the above results by focusing, not only on tasks designed by experimenters, but also on real-world tasks that people encounter in their everyday life: they asked undergraduate students to estimate their performance in course exams, members of college debate teams to estimate their tournament performance, and gun owners attending a competition at a gun club to estimate their performance regarding their knowledge of gun safety and usage (Ehrlinger et al., 2008). Other studies have replicated the above results among medical lab technicians assessing their knowledge of medical terminology and their problem-solving ability (Haun et al., 2000), family medicine residents evaluating their patient-interviewing skills (Hodges et al., 2001), medical students assessing their performance on an obstetrics and gynecology clerkship (Edwards et al., 2003), undergraduate students evaluating their knowledge of general chemistry (Bell & Volckmann, 2011), and graduate students assessing their levels of racial- and gender-based egalitarianism (West & Eaton, 2019).[1]

The Dunning-Kruger effect is related to another form of overconfidence bias known as the above-average effect, which is the tendency whereby a person believes that his abilities, attitudes, or performances are superior to those of the average individual (Dunning et al., 1989; Alicke et al., 1995; and Alicke & Govorun, 2005). For example, the great majority of college professors think they are above-average teachers (Cross, 1977), and most drivers regard themselves as more skillful and less risky than the average driver (Svenson, 1981).[2]

It is also worth considering the conclusions of Deanna Kuhn's book *The Skills of Argument*, which offers "an analysis of elementary argumentative reasoning that is grounded in empirical data about the competencies and incompetencies that people exhibit in their argumentative reasoning about everyday topics" (1991: 15). Her research was carried out by interviewing both average people and experts. The main sample consisted of four groups of average people across the life span. Within each group, participants were selected from two educational levels (college and non-college), and men and women were equally represented. The other sample consisted of experts from three different groups: "(a) parole officers, assumed to have expertise regarding why prisoners return to crime; (b) teachers, assumed to have expertise regarding why children fail in school; and (c) philosophers, whom we regard as experts in the reasoning process itself" (1991: 20). They were all asked about what causes prisoners to return to crime, what causes children to fail in school, and what causes unemployment. Though the central focus of her investigation was

[1] Nuhfer et al. (2016, 2017) and Gignac and Zajenkowski (2020), by contrast, have argued that the so-called Dunning-Kruger effect is (mostly) a statistical artifact. The neo-Pyrrhonist would of course use the fact that 'experts' disagree about whether that effect is real as grist for his skeptical mill.

[2] The literature on overconfidence is vast. Other important studies include Lichtenstein and Fischhoff (1977), West and Stanovich (1997), and Moore and Healy (2008).

the thinking of average people, she included expert participants both to compare their performance with that of the main sample, and "to examine how expertise influences reasoning, in particular by comparing expert subjects' reasoning regarding the topic about which they have expertise with their reasoning regarding topics about which they have no particular expertise" (1991: 20). She found that people "hold coherent causal theories regarding the phenomena they are asked about," and that they "hold these theories with considerable conviction" (1991: 43), even though the phenomena in question are extremely complex, involving "multiple, interacting, multidirectional causes and effects, effects that moreover are variable across individuals and groups" (1991: 265). Some of the results of her research are worth mentioning. First, only 16% of the average participants were able to generate genuine evidence for their theories, and roughly 80% of those who were not took what they mistakenly regarded as genuine evidence as proof of the correctness of their theories. Second, most of the participants took the correctness of their theories for granted inasmuch as only 14% were able to generate counterarguments to their own theories and only 39% were able to conceive of an alternative theory. In Kuhn's view, these results point to people's limitations in their ability to evaluate the truth of their own theories because, in order to do so, one should be able to produce counterarguments or at least alternative theories. Now, regarding the certainty with which participants held their theories, Kuhn remarks:

> [F]or each of the topics a majority of subjects report being sure or very sure that their theories are correct. […]
>
> These certainty ratings show no differences as a function of age group or sex. Furthermore, in contrast to previous findings, there are no differences as a function of education: Subjects with lesser education are as sure that their theories are correct as more educated subjects. Nor do certainty ratings differ as a function of the actual quality of evidence the subject has generated: Subjects generating nonevidence or pseudoevidence are as certain as those generating genuine evidence. (1991: 197)

According to these results, then, most average people exhibit overconfidence in the correctness of their views regardless of the quality of the evidence they provide to support those views. This means that people tend both to confidently hold beliefs that are not well supported by the available evidence and to be impervious to the challenges to those beliefs raised by dissenters. This overconfidence also seems to be independent of a person's level of education, which means that even well-educated people tend to hold unjustified or poorly justified views and to be unable to appreciate the challenge that the existence of disagreements may pose to those views.

What about the performance of the expert participants? The reasoning of parole officers and teachers concerning the topics in which they have expertise showed no superiority over their reasoning concerning the other two topics. Their argumentative skills were in general no better than that of non-experts and, more importantly, their expertise did not enable them to be more open to appreciating the challenges posed by dissenters. The performance of the philosophers that were interviewed (PhD candidates at a highly reputed philosophy department) was considerably

different, but I will consider Kuhn's description of their performance in Sect. 8.6. She summarizes the shortcomings in the performance of participants thus:

> Subjects in the investigation described in this book display overconfidence, certainly, in their evaluation of evidence as well as in the certainty they express regarding the correctness of their causal theories. They also show confirmation and belief bias in their identification of evidence that would support and refute their theories, for example in generating counterarguments to others' theories more readily than to their own. They show belief bias as well in their evaluation of evidence, generally exhibiting weak boundaries between their own theories and the evidence presented to them. (1991: 276)

Given the findings of the studies that have been reviewed, it seems that, when appealing to personal information to resolve a disagreement, one cannot exclude either the possibility that one will ascribe to oneself cognitive abilities that do not accord with those one actually possesses, or the possibility that one will believe one has had a performance in evaluating the disputed matter that one has not actually had. Inaccurate self-assessment is not a phenomenon restricted to only a few people in specific domains, but rather affects both average people and alleged experts in various domains. You may be thinking that the case of renowned philosophers, psychologists, political theorists, sociologists, or economists is different because they are smart, well trained, and well informed. If anything, they are among the skilled who underestimate their cognitive abilities and performance. Note, first, that if that were indeed the case, their self-assessment would be inaccurate and they would mistakenly lower their confidence in the correctness of their views on the disputed matters. Second, if we restrict ourselves to philosophers, they do not seem to be particularly humble, even when they propose solutions to intractable problems that have haunted us since antiquity. Third, and more importantly, given the many entrenched and long-standing disagreements that exist among the members of all the above groups and assuming that they cannot all be right, it seems that most of them have actually overestimated their cognitive abilities or their performance in assessing the matters under dispute and are unaware of their inaccurate estimation.

8.3 The Bias Blind Spot

Because of its connection with people's overestimation of their cognitive performance relative to others and its direct relevance to the phenomenon of disagreement, it is worth taking a close look at research on the phenomenon of *bias blind spot*.[3] The blind spot in bias perception occurs when one observes an asymmetry in susceptibility to bias between oneself and others: one sees oneself as less susceptible to cognitive and motivational biases than others.[4] For instance, in one study

[3] See Pronin et al. (2002a, 2004), Ehrlinger et al. (2005), Frantz (2006), and Pronin (2007). See also Wilson and Brekke (1994: 125–126) and Pronin et al. (2002b: 653–665).

[4] I understand bias as a distorting influence under which a person makes judgments or decisions that are mistaken, unjustified, or suboptimal because they do not accord with what are taken to be

participants claimed to be less susceptible to various biases than the average American, their average classmates, and their fellow airport travelers (Pronin et al., 2002a: 370–374). Given that the bias blind spot prevents us from recognizing the influence of cognitive and motivational biases on ourselves, it has been characterized as a "metabias" or "metacognitive bias" (West et al., 2012: 507, 513–514).

It has been argued that this metabias cannot be understood entirely in motivational terms, i.e., as a way to enhance a positive view of oneself by denying susceptibility to biases that are socially undesirable. In addition to such a self-enhancing bias, naïve realism and cognitive availability also play a role in creating the biased perception of freedom from bias (Pronin et al., 2002a). Naïve realism refers to the assumption that our opinions about people, objects, and events in the world are veridical or undistorted perceptions of an objective reality that are shared by other open-minded and impartial seekers of truth who have the same information as we do about those people, objects, and events. As a result, when others do not share our opinions despite having the same information, we tend to explain this disagreement either as reflecting their personality traits or dispositions, or as resulting from the distorting influence of various biases that prevent them from having accurate perceptions of reality or drawing reasonable conclusions from the available information (Pronin et al., 2002a: 369, 378–379; 2004: 781, 783; Pronin, 2007: 39–40).[5] As Emily Pronin, Thomas Gilovich, and Lee Ross remark:

> [I]nferences about bias in others follow directly from the discovery that those others do not share one's views about issues and events, and from the attributions placed on such differences. […] More specifically, people assume that while their own assessments reflect a logical, bottom-up progression from evidence and rational considerations to reasonable inferences and conclusions, others' assessments reflect a top-down process whereby preexisting motives and beliefs bias subsequent inferences and perceptions. (2004: 788–789)

The role played by cognitive availability is seen in the fact that the self-other asymmetry in assessments of susceptibility to bias manifests itself only with respect to biases of whose impact one is unaware. When a bias is highly available either at the time it is manifesting itself or afterwards when its effects become obvious, people perceive themselves as being as flawed as others, and sometimes even more so (Pronin et al., 2002a: 371–372, 379; 2004: 788, 792–793). The problem is that, as will be noted below, people are not normally aware of the influence of biases, not even when they are given a description of the bias and urged to acknowledge its influence.

As we will see in the next section, there is ample evidence that we lack direct access to the mental processes that influence our perceptions and judgments. As a result, we do not experience the biasing effects of those processes, which leads us to think that we perceive reality without distortion (Pronin et al., 2002a: 378; 2004:

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objective rational standards. The deviations or errors caused by a bias are systematic. Biases are usually divided into two main groups: those that are caused by failure to know or apply a rule of inference and those that are caused by the influence of a mental process that is unconscious and uncontrollable (see Wilson & Brekke, 1994).

[5] For an in-depth analysis of naïve realism, see Ross and Ward (1996), also Pronin et al. (2002b).

784). We are thus subject to an *introspection illusion*, which is our tendency to overvalue introspection as a reliable means of gaining self-insight when in fact introspective information is dramatically limited and may be highly misleading.[6] This illusion contains three elements:

> (i) it occurs when people are considering their own (as opposed to other people's) introspections; (ii) it involves a trade-off between the consideration of introspective information (e.g. thoughts, feelings, motives) versus other information (e.g. behavioral information, naïve theories, population base rates); and (iii) it results not simply from plentiful access to introspective information (of the sort actors, but not observers, typically have) but from the perceived diagnostic value of that information. (Pronin, 2007: 38–39)

Although Pronin is not explicit about this, it seems clear that, in her later account of the bias blind spot, the introspection illusion occupies the place that cognitive availability occupied in the account offered in Pronin et al. (2002a). The bias blind spot is now to be explained by three mechanisms: self-enhancement, naïve realism, and introspection illusion. The change is not radical, though, since the person under the introspection illusion bases his self-assessment on what is cognitively available to him. According to Pronin, then, when people examine whether their judgments and inferences have been biased, they rely heavily on introspective information: they think that, if they were biased, they would be aware of it. However, given that the influence of bias typically occurs non-consciously, the result of their introspective self-assessment is that there is no such influence: they find no phenomenological trace of the bias. By contrast, when they examine whether others have succumbed to bias, they rely on information deriving from external sources, such as observable behavior and general theories of what biased behavior looks like. This asymmetry in the information used to evaluate oneself and others is related to a set of biases known as illusions of asymmetric insight, which result from the conviction that while knowing oneself requires having access to one's private thoughts, feelings, and intentions, knowing others is possible by attending solely to their behaviors, gestures, and verbal responses (Pronin et al., 2001, 2004: 794). Under the influence of those illusions, one believes that one knows others better that they know oneself, that one knows oneself better than others know themselves, and that one knows others better than they know themselves. It has also been shown that group members exhibit a similar bias: they believe that their own in-groups know out-groups better than *vice versa* (Pronin et al., 2001, 2002b: 656–659).

The third element of the introspection illusion mentioned in the quoted passage is particularly relevant to the discussion of whether appealing to personal information is a reliable strategy for dealing with disagreements. For it seems to me that proponents of that strategy would deny that the dialectical symmetry between disputants who both appeal to personal information has any epistemic implications on the basis that, from one's own first-person perspective, the personal information of one's opponent is not as valuable as one's own personal information. As Pronin points out, although self-other differences in the weighing of introspective

[6] See Pronin (2007, 2009), Pronin and Kugler (2007), also Pronin et al. (2004: 783–784, 791–792).

information reflect the fact that people have far more access to their own introspections than to others', those differences are also due to the greater value people assign to their own introspections:

> Studies have shown that: (i) people report that internal information is a more valuable source of information about their own bias than others' bias; (ii) people show a bias blind spot even when they have detailed access to others' introspections; and (iii) people believe that an actor's bias is more aptly defined by introspective contents when that actor is themselves rather than someone else. (Pronin, 2007: 39; cf. Pronin & Kugler, 2007: 566)

It has been argued that, in evaluating whether others are biased, we rely on abstract theories rather than on introspective reports because we regard these reports with skepticism: we know that people are capable of deceiving both others and themselves (Ehrlinger et al., 2005: 681–682, 686). Interestingly, in one study conducted by Emily Pronin and Matthew Kugler (2007: 573), the great majority of observers who had access to actors' introspective reports viewed these reports as faithful accounts of the actors' ongoing thoughts. Nevertheless, they saw the actors as more biased than the latter saw themselves and, moreover, attributed to the actors amounts of bias that were similar to those attributed by observers who did not have access to the introspective reports. The crucial question is whether the asymmetry in the valuation of our own introspections and those of our opponents is legitimate. If the reason for such an asymmetry is simply that the former introspections are our own, then our assignment of greater value to them is wholly arbitrary. If the reason is rather our suspicion that others may be deceiving themselves, then we should remember that we, too, are capable of deceiving ourselves. If knowing about my opponent's introspective information is insufficient to change my perception of bias in him because I take the influence of bias to be typically unconscious, then what is so special about my own introspective information that enables me to legitimately claim that I am free from the very same biasing influence?

From what we have seen thus far, there is a close connection between one's perception of bias in others and one's reaction to disagreement. In this regard, it has been claimed that "attributions of bias are born in perceptions of disagreement" (Pronin et al., 2004: 789). Some studies have provided evidence that people are particularly blind to their own biases or to those of their allies in situations of disagreement: they are able to recognize biased responses in others who disagree with them, but not in themselves or those who share their opinions. In a series of studies on the liking bias, while participants "seemed fully aware that liking influences the judgments of others," they "maintained that their natural likes and dislikes did not influence their responses, even though these preferences correlated with their conclusions about the conflict" (Frantz, 2006). They thought that, unlike their opponents, they were trying to be fair, to consider the facts, and to see both sides. As Cynthia Frantz (2006: 166) notes, the conflicts used in her studies were ones in which participants were not personally involved, and it is reasonable to assume that the biasing effects of their affective preferences would have been more dramatic if the conflicts had involved people whom participants knew or if they themselves had been parties to those conflicts. It is also worth noting that Frantz takes the bias blind

spot to explain the previously documented backfiring effect occurring when people are motivated to be fair: in two studies participants were encouraged to be fair when examining both sides of a conflict so as to help them correct their liking bias—people tend to favor the side they like (Franz & Janoff-Bulman, 2000). However, this fairness motivation backfired: although participants did put more effort into thinking about the conflict, the effort did not eliminate bias. Moreover, those who had a preference for one side over another focused their extra effort on supporting their own side rather than on rethinking the credentials of the rival side (Franz & Janoff-Bulman, 2000). The bias blind spot would explain this result as follows: when people are encouraged to be fair but find no introspective evidence of bias, they state more emphatically their views on the disputed matter. Although they have a naïve theory according to which liking biases both sides of a dispute, they are unable detect this bias in their own views because it is unavailable to conscious awareness (Frantz, 2006: 158).

It has been remarked that it is possible to eliminate the bias blind spot by educating people about the limited value of introspective evidence (Pronin, 2007: 39; Pronin & Kugler, 2007: 574–575). This is actually much more difficult than it might seem, though. First, as Pronin herself points out, it remains to be established whether such "'introspective education' not only leads people to recognize their susceptibility to biases, but also leads them to engage in efforts to correct for these biases" (2007: 40). Second, in one study the large majority of participants denied the biasing influence exerted by certain factors even after just exhibiting the bias, being given an explicit description of it, and being invited to acknowledge its influence (Pronin et al., 2002a: 374–376). Third, it has been shown that people are unable to correct for the liking bias even after just exhibiting it and being explicitly asked to overcome it (Frantz, 2006). Fourth, even when a person recognizes that his judgments, inferences, and decisions have been influenced by various factors, he believes that in his case those factors have actually led to increased insight or enlightenment rather than bias (Pronin et al., 2002a: 369; 2002b: 655–656; Ehrlinger et al., 2005: 682, 686–690). Fifth, two studies conducted by Richard West, Russell Meserve, and Keith Stanovich have shown that cognitive sophistication does not attenuate the bias blind spot with respect to the classic cognitive biases studied in the literature on heuristics and biases, that a larger bias blind spot is actually associated with higher cognitive ability, and that being free of the bias blind spot does not help us avoid those cognitive biases (West et al., 2012). They offer an interesting explanation of part of these findings in terms of the dual-process theory of cognition: if naïve realism and overreliance on introspection are developmentally basic or primitive Type 1 processes, then they are not prone to be overridden and are not highly correlated with more recently acquired (from an evolutionary vantage point) Type 2 cognitive processes. Sixth, in a series of experiments, Pronin and her colleagues found that people persist in their failure to recognize bias in their judgments even after acknowledging that the decision-making strategies or thought processes leading up to those judgments are biasing (Hansen et al., 2014). Thus, people have difficulty not only correcting for biases that have already affected their judgments, but also preventing the influence of acknowledged biases on their ongoing judgments.

Lastly, even if people believe that their judgments have been contaminated by biases and even if they are motivated to correct for such biases, they may make three errors: unnecessary correction (there was actually no bias to correct for), undercorrection (debiasing is insufficient), or overcorrection (debiasing is such that one ends up biased in the opposite direction) (Wilson & Brekke, 1994; Wilson et al., 2002).

Given that people rely mostly on introspection when assessing whether they are biased on a given occasion and on general theories about bias when assessing their general susceptibility to bias, they are more willing to concede that their judgments are in general subject to bias than to concede than any specific judgment of theirs has been contaminated by bias (Ehrlinger et al., 2005). Thus, while people are in general good bias detectors when they focus their attention on others, they are poor bias detectors when it comes to spotting biases that they themselves exhibit. In general, their awareness of the existence and influence of biases and their ability to detect them in others neither preclude them from falling prey to those biases nor make them aware that they have done so. Applied to the phenomenon of disagreement and the appeal to personal information as a symmetry breaker, the studies that have been reviewed give rise to the worry that, when relying on one's assessment of that information to support one's own view on the disputed matter and to downgrade one's opponent, one may be a victim of bias without realizing it. The existence of the bias blind spot thus provides a further reason to doubt that self-assessment based on personal information is an effective strategy for resolving disagreements from a first-person perspective. Also, given our tendency to regard others as being more biased than they actually are, we should be wary of downgrading our opponent by insisting that he must be biased. Consider the following remarks by Richard Fumerton:

> Do I have reason to suspect that some of my colleagues are plagued by more subtle defects? Perhaps I have some reason to believe, for example, that they are the victims of various biases that cause them to believe what they want to believe, or ignore evidence or arguments that they find inconvenient. Indeed, I suspect that I *do* have reason to believe that others are afflicted in such ways […]. (2010: 102)

> Furthermore, why should I think that *I* am any better at detecting and fighting *my* philosophical and political biases than the others upon whom I am casting aspersions?
>
> […] Well, here it's easy to sound a bit like an egomaniac. I do, in fact, think that I have got more self-knowledge than a great many other academics I know, and I think that self-knowledge gives me a better and more neutral perspective on a host of philosophical and political issues. I suspect that it is in part the fact that I take this belief of mine to be justified that I do think that I can sometimes discount to some extent the fact that well-known and respected intellectuals disagree with me. (2010: 103)

> Do I really suppose that I am justified in thinking that there is an asymmetry between myself and others when it comes to various epistemic defects? Am *I* any less likely to be blinded to what is reasonable to believe by antecedent views or desires? Well, to be honest I suppose that I think that I am. (2010: 105)

Though it might indeed be the case that Fumerton is better able to detect and fight cognitive and motivational biases than his rivals, his line of reasoning seems to be a clear illustration of the bias blind spot: he detects the influence of various biases on

his opponents while denying the influence of those biases on himself. We should be wary of Fumerton's downgrading of his opponents if, as remarked in some of the above studies, the attribution of bias to others tends to be caused by our natural endorsement of naïve realism: given that we take our opinions to result from undistorted perceptions of an objective reality, when others do not share them, we take the mere fact of their disagreement to be a clear indication that they are biased. To make matters worse, psychological findings indicate that, in the case of controversial social matters, people tend to evaluate evidence in a biased manner. In a classic paper, Charles Lord, Lee Ross, and Mark Lepper (1979) exposed the parties to a dispute about the deterrent efficacy of capital punishment to the same mixed and inconclusive empirical evidence. They found that subjects accepted at face value evidence that confirmed their initial views, but critically evaluated disconfirming evidence—a phenomenon that they call "bias assimilation" and that has also come to be known as "motivated reasoning" or "confirmation bias."[7] In addition, instead of leading to moderation and narrowing the disagreement, exposure to mixed and inconclusive evidence led to increased polarization—a phenomenon they call "attitude polarization." Thus, because of their biased assessment of the evidence, all the parties to a dispute can have their views strengthened by the very same body of evidence. As the authors point out:

> Our subjects' main inferential shortcoming […] did not lie in their inclination to process evidence in a biased manner. Willingness to interpret new evidence in the light of past knowledge and experience is essential for any organism to make sense of, and respond adaptively to, its environment. Rather, their sin lay in their readiness to use evidence already processed in a biased manner to bolster the very theory or belief that initially "justified" the processing bias. In so doing, subjects exposed themselves to the familiar risk of making their hypotheses unfalsifiable—a serious risk in a domain where it is clear that at least one party in a dispute holds a false hypothesis—and allowing themselves to be encouraged by patterns of data that they ought to have found troubling. (1979: 2107)

The significance of the study under consideration is that the kind of controversy on which it focuses is not an idealized but a real-world disagreement, the type of disagreement about complex and emotionally charged social issues that we constantly encounter in daily life and regarding which the available evidence is mixed and far from conclusive.

We can apply here the considerations of the previous chapter concerning the dialectical symmetry between the disputants that has epistemic implications. I remarked that, once each disputant becomes aware that they both appeal to personal information to retain their beliefs and to infer that there is some sort of epistemic failure on their opponent's part, each disputant acquires higher-order evidence to the effect that it is possible to be highly confident in one's personal-information-based

[7] Although the three concepts in question (especially motivated reasoning and confirmation bias) are sometimes distinguished, they are frequently used to refer to the same range of phenomena. On this fascinating (family of) bias(es), see also Mahoney (1977), Kunda (1990), Ditto and Lopez (1992), Munro and Ditto (1997), Nickerson (1998), Lord and Taylor (2009), and Hahn and Harris (2014).

assessment of one's epistemic situation even though one is mistaken in one's belief. It may similarly be argued that, once each disputant becomes aware that they both believe that they are less susceptible to various biases than their opponent, each disputant acquires higher-order evidence to the effect that one can be highly confident that one is not biased even though one is actually a victim of one or more biases. The person who remains highly confident that her position is correct because of the personal information she possesses, even after being confronted with the fact that her opponent equally appeals to personal information to ground his confidence in the opposite position, is reacting in the same way as the person who remains highly confident that she is not biased because of the introspective information she possesses, even after being confronted with the fact that her opponent equally appeals to introspective information to ground his confidence that he is not biased. In both cases, higher-order evidence is dismissed out of hand or at least without all the consideration it deserves.

The studies on the bias blind spot provide evidence that others can detect, more reliably than I can, the influence that various biases exert on me. It also seems that others can make more accurate judgments about my own personality than I can, and better predictions of how I will behave (Wilson, 2002: 84–86; Wilson & Dunn, 2004: 508).[8] It could then be argued that, in the face of disagreement, I can trust my opponent's reliable assessment of the extent to which I am affected by bias to gain accurate knowledge of myself, which provides me with the opportunity to correct my biased judgment about the disputed matter and to accurately evaluate the evidence. Note, however, that there are two complications. First, my assessment of the extent to which my opponent is affected by bias seems to be equally reliable, which means that both of us may be victims of biasing influences and that it is not just a matter, for neither of us, of recognizing one's own biases and deferring to one's opponent to find the correct view on the matter under dispute. Second, if it were argued that, once each of us becomes aware of his own biases thanks to the other's assessment, we could jointly and impartially evaluate the available evidence, one should bear in mind that bias correction is, as noted above, at the very least extremely hard inasmuch as people have difficulty both correcting for biases that have already influenced their judgments and preventing the effects of acknowledged biases on their ongoing judgments.

[8] Note, however, that it is actually no easy task to decide who is right, if anyone is. As Wilson and Dunn remark: "Even if we did recognize that other people viewed us differently than we view ourselves on a particular dimension, it is not always clear who is correct. If Mary realizes that Jason thinks she is undependable, who is to say whether he is more correct than she is? It is possible that Jason is correct, to the extent that his impression is based on careful observations of Mary's past behavior. Surely, however, there are times when people know themselves better than their peers know them" (2004: 508).

8.4 Self-Knowledge Through Introspection

The question of how much self-knowledge can be gained through introspection was already tackled in the previous section, but only partially. My aim in this section is to focus specifically on that question.

In their famous article "Telling More than We Can Know" (1977), Richard Nisbett and Timothy Wilson review empirical evidence suggesting that we have little or no introspective access to the higher-order cognitive processes underlying our choices, judgments, inferences, and behavior. As they put it in a subsequent article, the evidence indicates that "whatever capacity for direct introspection on cognitive processes may exist, it is insufficient to produce generally accurate verbal reports about the effects of stimuli on one's own behavior" (1978: 118). They claim that sometimes people are unaware of the existence of a stimulus that has influenced a higher-order, inference-based response, sometimes they are unaware of the existence of the response, and sometimes they are unaware that an inferential process of any kind has taken place. They describe several experiments that show how we may go astray in our introspective reports. For instance, in two studies

> conducted in commercial establishments under the guise of a consumer survey, passersby were invited to evaluate articles of clothing—four different nightgowns in one study […] and four identical pairs of nylon stockings in the other […]. Subjects were asked to say which article of clothing was the best quality and, when they announced a choice, were asked why they had chosen the article they had. There was a pronounced left-right position effect, such that the rightmost object in the array was heavily overchosen. […] When asked about the reasons for their choices, no subject ever mentioned spontaneously the position of the article in the array. And, when asked directly about a possible effect of the position of the article, virtually all subjects denied it, usually with a worried glance at the interviewer suggesting that they felt either that they had misunderstood the question or were dealing with a madman. (1977: 243–244; cf. 1978: 123–124)

In this experiment and several others, all or most participants claimed that a given stimulus was influential when it actually had no effect on their responses, which strongly suggests that people tend to misidentify the causes of their feelings, judgments, and actions because they lack insight into those causes. Now, if we lack introspective access to our high-order cognitive processes, how are we to explain the fact that, while people usually look confused when asked about basic processes such as perception and memory, they readily offer answers when asked, e.g., why they behaved as they did, why they dislike someone, or how they solved a particular problem? Also, how are we to explain the fact that people's verbal reports on their higher-order cognitive processes are sometimes accurate (1977: 232)? Nisbett and Wilson find the answer to these questions in the fact that people's inaccurate reports on their cognitive processes are not capricious or random, but rather regular and systematic. For subjects who did not participate in the experiments but only read descriptions of them made predictions about the stimuli that were remarkably similar to those made by subjects who had been exposed to those stimuli. This indicates that both participants and observers draw on a similar source for their reports (1977: 247–248; 1978: 129). The authors maintain that, when people attempt to report on

the processes mediating the effects of a stimulus on a response, their reports are not based on direct observation of those processes, but rather on *a priori* causal theories about the extent to which a given stimulus is a plausible cause of a particular response (1977: 248–249; 1978: 129). People's reports will be accurate when (i) the stimulus that produces the response is highly salient or available, (ii) it is a plausible cause of the response, and (iii) few or no plausible but non-influential factors are available (1977: 253; 1978: 130). And, in general, their reports on their higher-order cognitive processes will be neither more nor less accurate than the predictions about such processes made by observers (1977: 249, 251; 1978: 130).

Nisbett and Wilson's two articles are part of a vast, growing literature on what are now known as dual-process theories or models of cognition that posit the existence of two information processing systems, one of which is much more accessible to consciousness or introspection than the other.[9] Setting aside the sometimes significant differences between the theories, they all maintain, as we saw in Chap. 1, that the functioning of the brain is characterized by two types of cognition usually referred to as Type 1 and Type 2, or as System 1 and System 2. Type 1 processing is fast, automatic, associative, implicit, involuntary, requires little or no effort, and is evolutionarily older. Type 2 processing is slow, controlled, analytic, propositional, effortful, is evolutionarily more recent, and one of its main functions is to override Type 1 processing. In his book *Strangers to Ourselves* (2002), Wilson examines what he calls the "adaptive unconscious," which essentially corresponds to Type 1 processing. He describes it as "a collection of modules that have evolved over time and operate outside of consciousness" (2002: 7), or as a collection of "mental processes that are inaccessible to consciousness but that influence judgments, feelings, and behavior" (2002: 23). Unconscious mental processes—which include a good deal of high-level and sophisticated thinking—are inaccessible to introspective scrutiny "quite possibly because they evolved before consciousness did" (2002: 8). The adaptive unconscious is crucial for survival in the world: "Consciousness is a limited-capacity system, and to survive in the world people must be able to process a great deal of information outside of awareness" (2002: 8). Wilson points out that people can use four general kinds of information to create explanations of their responses: shared causal theories, idiosyncratic theories, observations of covariation between one's responses and prior conditions, and private or inside knowledge (2002: 107–108). However, "despite the vast amount of information people have, their explanations about the causes of their responses are no more accurate than the explanations of a complete stranger who lives in the same culture" (2002: 108–109). Two reasons for this are that people are not very good at consciously perceiving co-variations between their responses and their antecedents (cf. Nisbett & Ross, 1980), and that their vast amount of inside information might actually interfere with the identification of the real causes of their responses (2002: 109–113). As regards introspection, Wilson remarks:

[9] See, e.g., Haidt (2001, 2013), Wilson (2002), Evans and Frankish (2009), Evans (2010), Kahneman (2011), Stanovich (2011), and Evans and Stanovich (2013).

> Introspection is best thought of not as illumination or archaeology but as writing a self-biography, with limited source information.
>
> […] No amount of introspection, however, can illuminate the contents of the adaptive unconscious, no matter how hard I try. Trying to access unconscious goals and motives results not in a direct pipeline to these states, but in a constructive process whereby the conscious self infers the nature of these states. (2002: 163; cf. Wilson & Dunn, 2004: 505)

The psychological studies just mentioned seem to provide grounds for questioning the appeal to one's information about the proper functioning of one's cognitive faculties, or about the reasons for one's beliefs, as a reliable strategy for resolving at least a considerable number of disagreements. But the skeptic about self-knowledge through introspection can go a step further and ask whether we can reliably acquire knowledge, or at least justified beliefs, about our current stream of consciousness. Even though they call into question introspection as a reliable means of acquiring knowledge of our cognitive processes, Nisbett and Wilson (1977: 255) remark that "we do indeed have direct access to a great storehouse of private knowledge" (see also Wilson, 2002: 108). Thus, while we have direct or privileged access to a great deal of our mental contents—such as our thoughts, sensations, and memories—we lack the same kind of access to the mental processes that produce them. It is important to note that Wilson has since come to believe that the distinction between mental contents and processes is not very tenable and that a better one is that between the adaptive unconscious and the conscious self: to the extent that people's judgments, emotions, and behaviors are caused by the adaptive unconscious, people do not have privileged access to their causes and must infer them, but to the extent that their judgments, emotions, and behaviors are caused by the conscious self, they do have privileged access to their causes (2002: 105–106). Wilson remarks, however, that not only may there be few cases in which one's response is the product of only an unconscious process or only a conscious one, but also the conscious thought preceding a response may not even play any causal role, the response and the thought being both produced by an unconscious intention (2002: 106–107). Be that as it may, note that, on both distinctions, we have privileged introspective access to much of our current phenomenology.

It seems, however, that one does not need to concede to introspection even that much. For example, Eric Schwitzgebel has taken issue with the view that our ongoing conscious experience is immune to doubt or easily and infallibly knowable. Schwitzgebel offers persuasive and empirically informed arguments to the effect that we err or are confused about our stream of conscious experience, emphasizing along the way the disagreements among both laypeople and researchers: we do not know whether we dream in color or black-and-white; we are not accurate judges of our visual experience of depth, our eyes-closed visual experience, our visual imagery, or our auditory experience of echolocation; we are in the dark regarding whether we see things double or single and whether consciousness is abundant or sparse; we are prone to go wrong in judging our ongoing emotional phenomenology; and we are at a loss as to whether there is a distinctive phenomenology of thinking. For instance, over a few decades there have been profound changes in people's opinions about the coloration or lack thereof of dreams, which do not seem to correspond to

equally profound changes in the dreams themselves (Schwitzgebel, 2011: chap. 1). Or most people (myself included) seem unaware of the fact that they are capable of echolocating objects and deny that they have auditory echoic experience of silent objects, thus failing to appreciate an introspectively discoverable aspect of their phenomenology (2011: chap. 4). Schwitzgebel expresses his skepticism about the reliability of introspection quite bluntly:

> The introspection of current conscious experience, far from being secure, nearly infallible, is faulty, untrustworthy, and misleading, not just sometimes a little mistaken, but frequently and massively mistaken, about a great variety of issues. If you stop and introspect now, there probably is very little you should confidently say you know about your own current phenomenology. (2011: 129)

Other philosophers, such as D. M. Armstrong (1963), Gregory Sheridan (1969), and David Palmer (1975), have also called into question the view that introspection provides us with privileged access, of one sort or another, to our own current sensations and feelings.[10] And despite the quotations provided above, Wilson actually shares Schwitzgebel's position as far as sensations and feelings are concerned, for he rejects what he calls "the incorrigibility argument," i.e., the view that people's introspective reports about their sensations and feelings are incorrigible or cannot be doubted (Wilson, 2002: 117–125). There are thus at least four philosophers and one psychologist who believe that introspective reports about one's phenomenology in general, or about one's sensations and feelings in particular, are not infallible, indubitable, or incorrigible, or who believe that there may be mental states (such as pains and visual sensations) of which we are not aware.

If these authors' views on our allegedly privileged access to our ongoing conscious experience is at least *prima facie* plausible, we have a reason to be cautious about the appeal, made by Sosa and Lackey (see Chap. 7), to the phenomenal given or to our current phenomenology as solid rock upon which we can construct a case for remaining steadfast in the face of certain kinds of disagreement. The neo-Pyrrhonist remarks both that there is no consensus about the question of whether all or part of our ongoing conscious experience is immune to doubt or can be infallibly

[10] It is here useful to bear in mind William Alston's (1989) illuminating distinction between different senses in which one can be said to have privileged access to one's current mental states: infallibility (one's statements about one's current mental states cannot be false or mistaken), indubitability (there can be no grounds for doubting those statements), incorrigibility (no one else can show that those statements are mistaken), omniscience (every feature of one's current mental states is represented in those statements), truth-sufficiency (one is so related to the statements that ascribe current mental states to oneself that is logically impossible both for those statements to be true and for one not to be justified in believing that they are true), and self-warrant (one is so related to the statements that ascribe current mental states to oneself that is logically impossible for one both to believe that those statements are true and not to be justified in holding this belief). Armstrong (1963)—who employs 'incorrigible' and 'indubitable' interchangeably to refer to what is infallible and 'privileged access' to refer to incorrigibility—targets infallibility, indubitability, and omniscience. Sheridan (1969) rejects infallibility—for which he uses 'incorrigibility'—while Palmer (1975) rejects omniscience.

known, and that he feels compelled to suspend judgment given his inability to decide between the opposing views on the matter.

8.5 Confabulation

Confabulation is a fascinating phenomenon not only for what it teaches us about the complexities of the human mind, but also for the skeptical implications it appears to have. What is confabulation? The most detailed characterization I know of is the one proposed by William Hirstein, according to whom a subject, S, confabulates if and only if:

1. S claims that *p*.
2. S believes that *p*.
3. S's thought that *p* is ill-grounded.
4. S does not know that her thought is ill-grounded.
5. S should know that her thought is ill-grounded.
6. S is confident that *p*. (Hirstein, 2005: 186; 2009: 5; cf. Hirstein & Ramachandran, 2009: 111, 134)

It should be stressed that the person who confabulates is not lying inasmuch as he is not aware that what he says is false and does not intend to deceive his interlocutor. Rather, he is reporting what he confidently believes is the case.

Chronic confabulation can be produced by different mental disorders: Korsakoff's syndrome, anosognosia for hemiplegia, Capgras delusion, asomatognosia, or Anton's syndrome, among others (see Schnider, 2018). Korsakoff's syndrome affects a person's memory and causes him either to report as memories events that did not occur (to him) or to report as recent memories events that occurred to him much earlier in his life. Anosognosia for hemiplegia causes people to deny that they are paralyzed and to offer made-up reasons for their inability to perform actions due to their paralysis—for instance, they may say that they cannot move one of their arms because they have arthritis or are tired. People afflicted with Capgras delusion claim that a person close to them has been replaced by a similar-looking impostor and confabulate when asked what the motives of the impostor are. Patients with asomatognosia insist that their paralyzed limb belongs to someone else. Those suffering from Anton's syndrome attempt to answer questions about what they see even though they are blind.

As Hirstein remarks, confabulation seems to be the product of two kinds of error, both of which are epistemic:

> First, a false response is created. Second, having thought of or spoken the false response, the patient fails to check, examine it and recognize its falsity. A normal person […] would notice the falsity or absurdity of such claims. The patient should have either not created the false response or, having created it, should have censored or corrected it. (2005: 2)

Put another way:

> First, an error occurs in some knowledge process [perceptual or mnemonic] that causes an ill-grounded thought […] in that domain. Second, frontally based processes that should

> function to verify that thought also fail. The failure of this second process is the phenomenon described by some writers as a failure to be self-reflective, to self-monitor, or to self-correct. (2005: 178; cf. Hirstein & Ramachandran, 2009: 110)

The difference between 'normal' people and clinical patients regarding both the production of false responses and the lack of self-monitoring is actually a matter of degree. For what is intriguing about confabulation is that it is not only a condition afflicting people suffering from the above disorders, but a phenomenon that can also be observed in mentally healthy people, albeit with a much lower intensity. Young children, subjects of hypnosis, eyewitnesses, or individuals asked to justify their judgments or choices or to describe their mental states may confabulate. As Hirstein points out, what we see in patients is "an extreme version of some basic feature of the human mind, having to do with the way we form beliefs and report them to others" (2005: ix).[11] And as Thalia Wheatley emphasizes, confabulation is an everyday phenomenon:

> [A] wealth of evidence suggests that the healthy brain is far from veridical. In its attempt to create a coherent and predicable world, even basic cognitive processes such as perception and memory are actively constructed, manipulated and embellished, often without our awareness. […] [T]he healthy brain fills in gaps, alters perceptions of time and space, and subsequently generates false beliefs for the purpose of creating meaning from confusing and often contradictory inputs. […] [F]iction may be the creation of every *human* mind, not only diseased ones. (2009: 203, cf. 219)

For example, visual illusions "demonstrate that, at the lowest levels of cognitive processing, the human brain prioritizes creating a sensible story over a faithful rendition of reality" (2009: 204). How are we to explain the confabulating tendency of our perceptual system? A possible explanation is evolutionary: "our hominid ancestors needed to make sense of impoverished information and do so quickly and efficiently" (2009: 206). Now, if confabulation is such a widespread phenomenon among 'normal' people, it seems that we should take seriously the possibility that one may be confabulating when claiming that one's personal information provides justifying grounds for sticking to one's own view in the face of disagreement.

Mnemonic confabulation is also a common phenomenon among healthy individuals. One paradigmatic case is that of eyewitness testimony, which seems to be much less reliable than most people believe. In a now classic book, Elizabeth Loftus (1979) conceives of eyewitness testimony as a three-stage process—the acquisition stage, the retention stage, and the retrieval stage—and explains how each of the stages can be affected by various factors that have distorting effects on a person's testimony by rendering his memories highly inaccurate without his being aware of it.[12] There has been a wealth of research on the implantation of entirely false memories of past events or actions through various memory-planting procedures such as

[11] Cf. Johnson (2000: 152), Johnson et al. (2000: 384, 392), Wilson (2002: 97), French et al. (2009: 34, 59), and Schnider (2018: chap. 6).

[12] For the view that eyewitness testimony is inaccurate or unreliable, see also Buckhout (1974), Haber and Haber (2000), and Hugo Münsterberg's pioneering book, *On the Witness Stand* (1908).

hypnosis, pressure to recall, and imagination inflation,[13] as well as on memory distortion caused in a person by the biased way this person retells an event—biased retelling being pervasive in everyday social interactions.[14] False memories are a kind of confabulation because the person who has a false memory claims to remember something that either did not happen at all or did not happen in the way he claims it did. When a memory of something—a big or small detail or an entire event—that did not exist is created, it can be as real or vivid to the person as a memory resulting from his perceptions, so that it is extremely difficult to discriminate between them from a first-person perspective. As French, Garry, and Loftus (2009: 49–51) point out, we still lack a reliable method that would enable people to distinguish between their true and false memories. Sometimes the false memory is caused by an error in source monitoring, which is the ability to identify the original source of the information retrieved by memory: for example, one may take the source of the memory of an event to be the observation of the event when it is actually the (repeated) imagining of the event or the reading of a description of the event. The crucial point for present purposes is that non-clinical individuals can produce mnemonic confabulations, which are "a byproduct of normally functioning memory processes and mechanisms, rather than the result of pathological conditions. False memories are completely normal and frequent in everyday life" (French et al., 2009: 34). As Loftus and other memory researchers remark:

> Human perception and memory function effectively by being selective and constructive. […] Perception and memory are decision-making processes affected by the totality of a person's abilities, background, attitudes, motives and beliefs, by the environment and by the way his recollection is eventually tested. The observer is an active rather than a passive perceiver and recorder; he reaches conclusions on what he has seen by evaluating fragments of information and reconstructing them. (Buckhout, 1974: 24)

> Memory does not work like a videotape recorder; people do not sit and passively take in information, recording it the way a videotape recorder would record it. Rather, they take in information in bits and pieces, from different sources, at different times, and integrate this information together. In a sense, people actually construct memories. (Loftus, 1979: 213, see also 234)

> Different descriptions of a single event provided by observers reflect the difficulty any one observer has in encoding and then reporting the event the way it would be recorded by a video recording. Research has overwhelmingly shown that […] human beings are neither unbiased observers nor veridical recorders. (Haber & Haber, 2000: 1059)

> [W]hat people remember about the past may have as much to do with what has happened since a particular event as it does with the event itself. In short, memory is a reconstruction, not a concrete record of what actually happened. (French et al., 2009: 43)

[13] See, e.g., Loftus (1993, 1997), Hyman et al. (1995), Hyman and Pentland (1996), Loftus and Pickrell (1995), Garry et al. (1996), Goff and Roediger (1998), Mazzoni and Memon (2003), Seamon et al. (2006), Shaw and Porter (2015), and Scoboria et al. (2017).

[14] See, e.g., Tversky and Marsh (2000), Dudukovic et al. (2004), Marsh et al. (2005), Marsh (2007), and Barber and Mather (2014).

> Scientific research has amply demonstrated that normal memory processes are reconstructive rather than reproductive in nature and susceptible to a variety of errors and distortions. (Chrobak & Zaragoza, 2009: 67)

Although some people do not develop false memories, "we do not know who they are, or what protects them from developing false memories," and research "suggests that virtually everyone is susceptible to memory distortion and confabulation" (French et al., 2009: 60). Now, if mnemonic confabulation is such a common phenomenon, then it seems naïve to expect that, e.g., a real-life disagreement between two eyewitnesses may be resolved from a first-person perspective by appealing to the information one has about the normal functioning of one's memory. For our memory may be functioning normally, but what we take to be its normal functioning does not appear to correspond to what its normal functioning actually is: we take a normally functioning memory to be a reliable recorder of what actually happened, when in reality what we remember is a construction or a reconstruction.[15]

The phenomenon of confabulation has also been a focus of attention in the psychological studies that examine the influence of intuitions and emotions on moral judgments and voting decisions. Regarding moral judgments, some moral psychologists have called into question, on the basis of a number of ingenious experiments, the rationalist view according to which moral judgment is caused by a process of conscious reasoning or reflection, claiming instead that it is primarily and directly caused by moral intuitions and emotions. For instance, in two experiments conducted by Thalia Wheatley and Jonathan Haidt, highly hypnotizable individuals were given the post-hypnotic suggestion to experience "a brief pang of disgust … a sickening in your stomach" (2005: 780) whenever they read one of two arbitrary words ('often' and 'take'). In the first of the experiments, participants were then asked to read a set of vignettes (some containing the words in question, others not) describing moral transgressions and to morally rate the transgressions. Participants rated the transgressions as both more disgusting and more morally wrong when the words in question were used than when they were not. One of the changes introduced in the second experiment was that a new story containing no moral transgression was added. In this case, when the new story included one of the two arbitrary words, some participants made a negative moral judgment about the act described in the story. These participants were puzzled by their negative evaluation, or desperately searched for some kind of justification unrelated to the story, or claimed that, despite not knowing why, the act was just wrong. The authors conclude that their findings indicate that gut feelings influence moral judgment: subjects interpreted

[15] It should be noted that some psychologists have recently defended the inherent reliability of memory in connection with eyewitness testimony: see Wixted et al. (2015, 2016), Wixted and Wells (2017), Wixted et al. (2018), and Brewin et al. (2020). Far from being a problem for the neo-Pyrrhonist, the 'expert' disagreement about the reliability of eyewitness memory is more grist for his skeptical mill.

their feelings of disgust as information about the wrongness of the acts they were reading about.[16]

According to the social intuitionist model defended by Haidt (2001, 2013), moral judgment is in general the result of intuitions—i.e., quick, automatic, effortless, and affectively laden evaluations—and moral action co-varies more with moral emotion than with moral reasoning. In his view, moral reasoning is usually nothing but an *ex post facto* process by means of which one seeks arguments that will justify an already-made judgment with the aim of influencing the intuitions and actions of others (Haidt, 2001: 814, 818; 2013: xx–xxi).[17] If Haidt's theory is correct, two interrelated points are worth making with regard to moral judgment. First, it seems that moral disagreements are to be explained, at least to a considerable extent, by the different emotions experienced by the disputants rather than by their making reason-based judgments. Second, we have limited self-knowledge inasmuch as most of us are unaware of the emotional component of our moral judgments and usually construct fictional stories or arguments with the aim of justifying those judgments. Note that even someone who is aware that people's emotions exert a significant influence on their moral judgments may be unable to determine the extent to which at present a moral judgment of his is under such an influence. Thus, if Haidt's theory is correct, it seems unrealistic to expect that, when involved in a real-life moral disagreement, one may resolve it by having recourse to the information one possesses about the reasons for one's moral view on the disputed issue or about the normal functioning of one's cognitive capacities.

As regards voting decisions, Alexander Todorov and his colleagues claim that inferences of competence of political candidates based only on their facial appearance made it possible to predict better than chance the results of U.S. congressional elections in 2000, 2002, and 2004 (Todorov et al., 2005). Such inferences were made by undergraduate and graduate students at Princeton University on the basis of a one-second exposure to pairs of head-shot photographs of candidates about whom they had no prior knowledge. The authors point out that the findings of the studies suggest that rapid and unreflective trait inferences from facial appearance can contribute to voting decisions, which are usually taken to be based mainly on rational and careful considerations, such as the candidate's position on issues the voter considers important. They also argue that such inferences can influence subsequent deliberate judgments about the candidates and that correction of initial impressions by the acquisition of additional information may be insufficient. These

[16] For further evidence that experimentally induced feelings of disgust unconsciously influence moral judgments by making them harsher, see Schnall et al. (2008), Horberg et al. (2009), and Eskine et al. (2011).

[17] This is not restricted to moral issues. Cf. Kahneman: "In the context of attitudes […] System 2 is more of an apologist for the emotions of System 1 than a critic of those emotions—an endorser rather than an enforcer. Its search for information and arguments is mostly constrained to information that is consistent with existing beliefs, not with an intention to examine them" (2011: 103–104).

results were confirmed and enlarged in subsequent studies (see Ballew & Todorov, 2007; Olivola & Todorov, 2010).[18]

The non-conscious influence of epistemically distorting factors on voting decisions can also be seen in two studies, conducted by Jonah Berger, Marc Meredith, and S. Christian Wheeler (2008), that show that the location where people are assigned to vote influences vote choice. The first study analyzed precinct-level election results from the Arizona 2000 general election, which included a ballot initiative that proposed raising the state sales tax to increase education funding. The authors found that those who voted at schools were more likely to support the initiative. The second study was a follow-up experiment in which three-hundred and twenty-seven subjects were exposed to either images of schools (e.g., classrooms or lockers) or images of control locations (e.g., office buildings). Those exposed to the former images were more likely to support the school funding initiative. More relevant for present purposes is that, when they were debriefed, none of them thought that the exposure to school images increased their support for the initiative, which suggests that "environmental stimuli can influence voting choice outside of awareness" (2008: 8848).

The experimental research on voting decisions appears to provide strong evidence that often enough we confabulate when explaining the reasons why we chose a given candidate or supported a given initiative inasmuch as those were not the real reasons for our decisions. If so, then we seem to have grounds for thinking that also in the case of political disagreements it might be naïve or unrealistic to expect that one can privilege one's view over the view of one's rival by relying on the information one has about the reasons for one's view or the reliability of one's cognitive faculties.

That confabulation is a phenomenon of everyday life has also been shown by Nisbett and Wilson (1977, 1978), who, as noted in the previous section, provided a wealth of evidence to the effect that normal people often offer confabulated explanations of their judgments or choices (see also Wilson, 2002: 97, 99, 106). Overconfidence, too, might perhaps be viewed as a form of confabulation: we usually tell ourselves stories about our own capacities and performance that are not supported by the available evidence, and we are quite confident of the veracity or the accuracy of those ill-founded stories. Why do we not realize that we confabulate so often? The reason is perhaps that we do not want to face reality, or that we suffer from a blind spot, or simply that we are not smart enough to realize how limited our self-knowledge actually is. For example, social psychology has found evidence that people's judgments and interpretations are often guided by the desire to view the world and themselves in a way that makes them feel good about themselves or that maintains a sense of well-being (Wilson, 2002: 38–40, 90).

[18] Kahneman interprets the results of these studies in the following way: "Voters are attempting to form an impression of how good a candidate will be in office, and they fall back on a simpler assessment that is made quickly and automatically and is available when System 2 must make its decision" (2011: 91).

Confabulation is a clear example of failure of self-knowledge: we confabulate not only about choices that may be considered trivial, but also about questions that we take to reveal who we are, such as our personal histories and our political and moral beliefs or choices. If we accept the results of the experimental studies that have been reviewed, it seems that we should conclude that the frequent occurrence of the phenomenon of confabulation among ordinary people poses a serious challenge to the appeal to personal information as a reliable strategy for settling disputes from a first-person perspective. For it seems that, more often than we think, the narratives we tell about the causes of our decisions, choices, or beliefs are highly inaccurate and create the illusion that we know much more about ourselves than we in fact do. You are probably thinking that this picture according to which at least a considerable part of what you think you know about yourself is a mere fabrication is too extreme and has nothing to do with your own experience. But this is precisely what one should expect from a cognitive illusion. Also, as Johnson et al. remark:

> Brain damage does not make a perfect system imperfect. It makes an imperfect system worse. Thus, in a way, brain damage can serve to magnify normal experience. An amnesic is us when we cannot remember and know we can't. A confabulating patient is us when we do not remember accurately and don't know we don't. […] [I]t may seem easier to see ourselves in the amnesic than in the confabulator, but that may be because we have had many more conscious experiences of forgetting than of misremembering. That is, we more often are aware of our errors of omission than our errors of commission. (2000: 384)

In referring to the studies reviewed in Sects. 8.2, 8.3, 8.4 and 8.5, I do not intend to argue that conscious reasoning plays no role in our judgments, decisions, and actions—Haidt and Kahneman are cautious in this respect.[19] Rather, my aim is to call attention to the fact that there is ample empirical evidence to the effect that a considerable number of our judgments, decisions, and actions—a number greater than we might be willing to recognize—appear to be the result of the distorting and unconscious influence of intuitions, feelings, or emotions, and that the reasons we offer in support of those judgments, decisions, and actions are mere rationalizations.[20] My procedure here is one hundred percent Pyrrhonian: when confronted with philosophers or laypersons who are confident that they have extensive and accurate self-knowledge and that they can resolve disagreements by relying on it, I avail myself of experimental research that paints a considerably different picture. I do so not with the intention to prove that such a picture is correct, but rather to show that there exists a disagreement about the extent and accuracy of self-knowledge—a disagreement that at least I myself am unable to resolve. If so, then it seems that we

[19] Similarly, those psychologists who have done extensive research on bias usually remark that they do not intend to cast doubt on human cognitive capacities in general (see, e.g., Nisbett & Ross, 1980: xii, 14).

[20] It should be clear that the experimental studies that have been reviewed represent a threat not only to epistemic internalism, but also to epistemic externalism. For the challenge they pose is not only that we do not have reflective access to our belief-forming processes and cannot tell when we are under the influence of epistemically distorting factors, but also that those belief-forming processes are often unreliable.

have reason to call into question the view that one can rely on personal information to resolve disagreements from a first-person perspective.

8.6 Objections and Replies

In this section, I will consider four objections to the neo-Pyrrhonist's use of the experimental studies discussed in the foregoing sections.

First objection: it is plain that, in certain disagreements, one of the disputants is unintelligent or motivationally and cognitively biased, and it is also plain that there are certain individuals, or groups of individuals, on whom we can rely because they are intelligent and skilled enough to overcome or mitigate the distorting influence of biases. Think of the disparaging attitude that many highly regarded philosophers at top universities in the civilized world adopt towards the supporters of conservative or right-wing political leaders in the United States and in some European and Latin American countries.[21] For them, it is obvious that those supporters are empty-headed, ignorant, or ideologically biased. They tend to adopt the same disparaging attitude towards those who hold conservative views on such issues as sex and abortion. The philosophers in question may be regarded as a reliable group when it comes to controversial political, moral, and religious issues. In this regard, note that in Sect. 8.2, when reviewing Kuhn's research on people's argumentative skills, I observed that the performance of philosophers was superior to that of the other groups, even though none of them had any special expertise in any of the domains covered by the interviewer's questions. Kuhn (1991: 258–262) reports that philosophers showed perfect performance in the generation of genuine evidence, alternative theories, counterarguments, and rebuttals; critically examined the evidence presented to them; appreciated the complexity of the phenomena under examination; and recognized the plurality of possible causes leading to the outcome and the interactive relations among them. Philosophers, then, did not seem to exhibit the biases affecting the other groups, such as confirmation bias and belief bias.[22] Similarly, Jonathan Haidt remarks that "the reasoned judgment link" of his social intuitionist model of moral judgment "recognizes that a person could, in principle, simply reason her way to a judgment that contradicts her initial intuition," and that Kuhn's work "suggests that such an ability may be common only among philosophers, who have been extensively trained and socialized to follow reasoning even to very disturbing conclusions" (Haidt, 2001: 829; see also 2001: 819 and 2013: 385 n. 44).

[21] A notable exception is Fumerton, who openly manifests his pride of "the foreign policy of the United States over the last hundred years or so," claims that "the wars we fought were the right wars to fight, and even when they weren't, we fought for admirable reasons," and remarks that, "if anything, we ought to be far more aggressive in confronting hostile nations in the Middle East and elsewhere" (2010: 100).

[22] Belief bias occurs when a person believes an argument, even if it is unsound, because he already believes the conclusion that seems to be supported by the argument.

Given that Kuhn's subjects were five advanced PhD candidates, it could be argued that, if they exhibited such cognitive skills, we may expect a higher performance from mid-career and senior philosophers. Notice, in this connection, that a number of analytic philosophers have claimed, in reaction to the heretical field of experimental philosophy, that their training and experience inoculate them to a large extent against the distorting influence that epistemically irrelevant factors might exert on their intuitive judgments about thought experiments (e.g., Kauppinen, 2007; Ludwig, 2007; Williamson, 2007: chap. 6, 2011; Grundmann, 2010; Hofmann, 2010). Given that this reply to the challenge raised by experimental philosophy treats philosophers as expert intuiters, it has come to be known as "the expertise defense."

Reply: there are at least three reasons to have reservations about the view that we can rely on (certain groups of) philosophers because they are able to overcome to a large extent the contaminating influence of motivational and cognitive biases. First, experimental research on the influence of biases on philosophers' judgments and decisions provide evidence that even highly trained and well-respected philosophers may be affected by them, despite their high confidence that their own attitudes and behavior are rational, impartial, open-minded, tolerant, progressive, and the like. For instance, Eric Schwitzgebel and Fiery Cushman (2012) have provided evidence that such an epistemically irrelevant factor as order of presentation exerts a significant influence both on professional philosophers' moral judgments about hypothetical scenarios and on their endorsement of related general moral principles—which suggests that these principles are recruited *post hoc* to rationalize prior judgments. It is especially of note that such an influence was observed even among moral philosophers who were already familiar with the scenarios and principles in question, that the effects of the epistemically irrelevant factors on moral judgments were similar for philosophers and non-philosophers, and that their effects on the endorsement of general moral principles were considerably larger for philosophers than for non-philosophers. Thus, philosophical expertise does not seem to enhance the stability either of the moral judgments one makes or of the moral principles one endorses. In a subsequent study, Schwitzgebel and Cushman (2015) examined the influence of both framing and order of presentation on professional philosophers' moral judgments about hypothetical scenarios. Philosophers were subject to significant framing and order effects no less than non-philosophers, and they exhibited such effects despite their familiarity with the scenarios, their expertise on the issues under examination, their having stable opinions about those issues before participating in the experiments, and their having been encouraged to reflect on different variants of the scenario or different ways of describing it before providing a reply.[23] Note, in addition, that some studies have provided evidence that, despite holding strong

[23] For other studies that provide evidence of the unconscious influence of non-truth-tracking factors on philosophers' intuitive judgments, see Schulz et al. (2011), Tobia et al. (2013a, b), and Vaesen et al. (2013). While the first of these studies focuses on the influence of personality traits on intuitive judgments about free will, the second and third focus, respectively, on the influence of framing and cleanliness on intuitive moral judgments, and the fourth focuses on the influence of native language on intuitive epistemic judgments. For arguments against the expertise defense, see also Weinberg et al. (2010) and Mizrahi (2015).

egalitarian beliefs, many philosophers are subject to implicit bias (e.g., Saul, 2013b; Di Bella et al., 2016). The term 'implicit bias' is usually used to refer to negative evaluations of members of social groups—such as women, blacks, Latinos, disable people, and homosexuals—that are mostly outside of conscious awareness and control. Those groups are associated with negative concepts or roles mainly as a result of social stereotypes, and so their members are not judged according to their own personal traits and talents. Implicit bias may affect even the members of those groups and individuals who are committed to fighting discrimination and prejudice.[24] In sum, experimental research appears to provide evidence to the effect that philosophers' judgments and decisions may be subject to bias and other epistemically irrelevant factors despite their extensive training, reasoning skills, and alleged expertise.

With regard to the second reason to call into question the view that (certain groups of) philosophers are to a large extent immune to the contaminating influence of biases, consider the fact that quite a few of the same philosophers who look down on supporters of conservative leaders remain silent, or even attempt a defense, when, e.g., left-wing Latin American governments are accused, by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, or the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights, of offenses that those philosophers claim to condemn and that seem much worse than those committed by the governments they so fiercely criticize: shutting down of radio stations and ban of television channels; arbitrary detention of journalists; dismantlement of democratic institutions; repression and persecution of political opponents; detention, torture, rape, and ill-treatment of protesters; extrajudicial executions by security forces. Thus, such highly regarded academics appear to be ideologically blind to the evidence, having fallen prey to the same biases—such as confirmation bias and belief bias—they claim to affect those whom they hold in contempt.

The third reason to call into question the view that philosophers are in general able to mitigate the influence of motivational and cognitive biases is that, even if we conceded that they are on the whole in a better epistemic position than non-philosophers regarding a number of issues, and that we should therefore prefer their views when they disagree with non-philosophers about those issues, we face the problem that philosophers persistently disagree among themselves about almost everything—including the question of whether they should be considered experts who cognitively outperform non-philosophers. Hence, given the widespread and entrenched controversies that exist among philosophers, the following question arises: which philosopher's opinion should we prefer as not being (significantly) distorted by the influence of motivational and cognitive biases?

Second objection: while reading about the neo-Pyrrhonist's use of the experimental studies discussed in the preceding sections, you might have thought the following: "Hold on a sec, the neo-Pyrrhonist himself can be motivationally or

[24] For a wide-ranging exploration of implicit bias, see the essays in Brownstein and Saul (2016a, b). For discussion of the kind of skepticism generated by the extensive evidence of the distorting influence of implicit biases, see Saul (2013a) and Antony (2016).

cognitively biased, can't he? One could argue that his skepticism is actually the product of several motivational or cognitive biases that prevent him from realizing that we do possess knowledge or justified beliefs about many issues, or that equipollence is limited to a small number of disputes."

Reply: the neo-Pyrrhonist does not rule out the possibility that he is motivationally or cognitively biased. Rather, he observes that it seems extremely difficult to determine whether the skeptic, the non-skeptic, or both are motivationally or cognitively biased—just as it seems to be extremely difficult to determine who among the disagreeing non-skeptics is motivationally or cognitively biased. In describing his skepticism, the neo-Pyrrhonist limits himself to reporting how he is appeared to. He does recognize that the possibility cannot be excluded that the way he is appeared to is the result of biasing factors, but he also remarks that awareness of this possibility does not prevent him from continuing to be appeared to in a certain way.

Third objection: in appealing to experimental studies to exhibit the limits of self-knowledge, is the neo-Pyrrhonist not accepting *in propria persona* the findings of those studies?

Reply: when the neo-Pyrrhonist has recourse to experimental studies as a source of defeaters for certain views, he limits himself to reporting the findings of those studies and to examining the implications of such findings. He does not regard them as correct—nor, of course, does he claim that they are incorrect. The reason is twofold. First, some authors have argued that the challenges that experimental studies such as those reviewed earlier raise to the legitimacy of self-trust or to the value of reason can be met (e.g., Foley, 2001: chap. 3; Lynch, 2012: chap. 2), and so there is disagreement about the extent of the undermining effects of the findings of those studies. Second, the neo-Pyrrhonist is cautious when it comes to endorsing the results of experimental research. Just as our own personal history contains instances of the abandonment of positions we took to be strongly supported by the information available to us due to the discovery of new information or of a new way of looking at the same information, so too does the history of science contain many instances of the abandonment of theories we took to be strongly supported by the available data due to the discovery of new data or of a new theory that seems to better explain the same data. As we saw in Chap. 4, Sextus's argument from possible disagreement is an expression of that caution. It is thus possible that, e.g., Haidt's social intuitionist theory might be replaced in the future due to the discovery of new evidence or of a new theory that better explains the same evidence, just as that theory has replaced (at least according to Haidt) the rationalist theory defended by psychologists such as Lawrence Kohlberg, Jean Piaget, and Elliot Turiel, which used to dominate moral psychology a few decades ago. But given the foregoing considerations, why would a neo-Pyrrhonist avail himself of experimental studies whose results he does not endorse? Because, as noted in Chap. 2, he makes use of any available theory, hypothesis, or argument of which he is aware to carry out his ongoing truth-directed inquiries.

Fourth objection: should the neo-Pyrrhonist not accept that the findings of those studies show that it is after all possible for us to acquire accurate knowledge of ourselves inasmuch as they reveal how we actually function? And if so, would that not

mean that those studies are self-defeating or self-undermining, or that the neo-Pyrrhonist's use of them is so, inasmuch as, in order to maintain that the cognitive capacities by means of which we claim to know ourselves are unreliable, we must make use of those very same capacities, thus acquiring accurate knowledge of ourselves?

Reply: if the findings of those studies are correct—a claim the neo-Pyrrhonist does not make—then it appears that self-knowledge is indeed possible, but only insofar as we gain accurate information about the inner workings of the human mind in general. For it appears that it would still be quite difficult, from a first-person perspective, to determine whether and, if so, to what extent in particular circumstances one is under the influence of specific epistemically distorting factors. It appears as well that it would be even more difficult to resolve a disagreement in which all the parties may be affected by epistemically distorting factors. As regards the self-defeating or self-undermining objection, it should be noted that at least most cognitive psychologists do not maintain that the cognitive capacities by means of which we claim to know ourselves are unreliable *tout court*. It seems that the objection has bite only when raised to the skeptical use of the results of the experimental studies that have been reviewed. In reply, the neo-Pyrrhonist first remarks, once again, that he does not endorse the results of those studies, but rather makes a dialectical use of them to ascertain whether we actually have as much accurate self-knowledge as many believe we do. And second, he points out that, if those results are correct and cast doubt on the general reliability of our cognitive capacities, then it seems that we cannot completely exclude the possibility that reason is such that it ends up defeating or undermining itself.

8.7 Conclusion

The findings of the wide range of experimental studies reviewed in this chapter provide seemingly strong evidence that our self-knowledge is much more limited than we think, and hence that the strategy for resolving disagreements that appeals to personal information is ineffective. One may overestimate one's cognitive capacities and performance and be unaware of one's incompetence. One may be subject to various motivational and cognitive biases and fail to recognize this fact even after carefully considering whether such a biasing influence has occurred. One may misidentify the reasons why one holds the beliefs one holds and make up stories to justify one's decisions and choices. One may even lack privileged and reliable introspective access to one's own current conscious experience.

I should emphasize, first, that my point in this chapter and the preceding one has not been that we do not seem to have *infallible* or *perfect* access to our current conscious experience and the functioning of our cognitive faculties. Rather, my point has been that it is far from clear that we have *better* access to what is happening with ourselves than to what is happening with our opponents. Second, it has not been my

intention to affirm that we always make errors or that our judgments are never epistemically justified—those are dogmatic claims I refrain from making. If I have laid so much emphasis on the epistemically distorting or contaminating factors that seem to influence our judgments, it is because I intend to counterbalance the strong faith in the reliability of our cognitive capacities that is so widespread among both philosophers and the folk.

Appendix: Sextus and Galen on the Pyrrhonist's Knowledge of His Own Affections

If you have read the first part of this book, you know that I take Sextus's Pyrrhonism to be a radical form of skepticism. I must admit, though, that there is an issue concerning which his Pyrrhonism is not as radical as it could have been: as some interpreters have remarked, he seems to think that the Pyrrhonist can have knowledge of the way he is appeared to. In this Appendix, I provide textual evidence in favor of that interpretation, but also textual evidence in favor of the view that some ancient Pyrrhonists did go so far as to call into question their knowledge of their own appearances.

Consider, to begin with, the following four passages:

> When we say that the skeptic does not dogmatize, we do not use 'dogma' in the more general sense in which some say that dogma is acquiescing in something (τὸ εὐδοκεῖν τινὶ πράγματι), for the skeptic assents to the affections that are forced on him in accordance with an appearance (τοῖς […] κατὰ φαντασίαν κατηναγκασμένοις πάθεσι)—for example, he would not say, when heated or chilled, "I think I am not heated or chilled." (*PH* I 13)

> Those who say that the skeptics abolish the things that appear seem to me not to have heard what we say. For, as we said above, we do not overturn the things that lead us involuntarily to assent in accordance with a passive appearance (κατὰ φαντασίαν παθητικήν)—and those are the things that appear. And when we investigate whether the underlying object is such as it appears, we grant (δίδομεν) that it appears, and we do not investigate what appears but what is said about what appears; and this is different from investigating what appears itself. For example, it appears to us that honey sweetens. This we concede (συγχωροῦμεν), for we are perceptually sweetened (γλυκαζόμεθα […] αἰσθητικῶς). But if, in addition, it is sweet, as far as the argument goes, is something we investigate; that is not what appears but what is said about what appears. (*PH* I 19–20)

> We say, then, that the criterion of the skeptical approach is what appears, implicitly meaning by this the appearance; for given that this appearance lies in feeling and involuntary affection (πείσει […] καὶ ἀβουλήτῳ πάθει), it is not subject to investigation (ἀζήτητος). Hence, perhaps no one will dispute (ἀμφισβητήσει) whether the underlying object appears this way or that; rather, what is investigated is whether it is such as it appears. (*PH* I 22)

> For this reason, while both investigating and thinking the person who suspends judgment remains in the skeptical disposition; for, as it has been shown, he assents to the things that

> strike him in accordance with a passive appearance insofar as it appears to him (τοῖς κατὰ φαντασίαν παθητικὴν ὑποπίπτουσιν αὐτῷ, καθὸ φαίνεται αὐτῷ). (*PH* II 10)

Thus, the Pyrrhonist has beliefs (δόγματα) about his own affections (*PH* I 13), and he assents to his affections or the things that appear to him or the things that strike him in accordance with a passive appearance (*PH* I 13, 19, II 10).[25] The notions of belief and assent must be understood in the sense that the Pyrrhonist accepts, grants, or concedes that, at the present moment, he is affected or appeared to in a certain way. The Pyrrhonist accepts that he is affected or appeared to in a certain way because his affections or appearances impose themselves on him (*PH* I 13, 19, 193). Sextus also tells us that Pyrrhonian investigation does not concern the φαινόμενον itself (*PH* I 19–20) and that the φαντασία is not, or cannot be, subject to investigation (*PH* I 22; cf. DL IX 77). The reason is that one inquires into that which is non-evident (ἄδηλον) (e.g., *AD* I 393). What is non-evident is that about which there exists a disagreement that, at least thus far, has not been resolved owing to the lack of an agreed-upon epistemic criterion that would make it possible to make assertions about what is beyond the realm of appearances. Indeed, Sextus remarks that what is non-evident is a matter of disagreement or dispute and *vice versa* (*PH* II 8, 116, 168, 182, III 254; *AD* II 322, 327, 334–335; *AM* I 27, II 108). This is why at *PH* I 22 he points out that no one, probably, will dispute whether the object appears this way or that. Since there is no disagreement about whether one is appeared to in a given way or affected in a given way, it is not necessary to carry out an investigation intended to determine whether one is actually appeared to or affected that way. It seems that the Pyrrhonist would accept as true propositions like "It appears to me that *p*" or "I am affected in way W."[26] Sextus thus apparently thinks that it is clear, and hence not open to doubt, how one is appeared to. Why does he say that *perhaps* or *presumably* (ἴσως) no one will dispute how the object appears? The reason, it might be thought, is that he knew of certain people who called even that into question. Or he may be expressing the typically Pyrrhonian caution. Be that as it may, it seems clear that he himself does not call into question how he is appeared to. If this is correct, then Sextus thinks that one has privileged access to one's own conscious

[25] Mainly in the passages in which Sextus presents the skeptical outlook, one finds a close connection between three key terms, namely, φαινόμενον (what appears, what is apparent), φαντασία (appearance), and πάθος (affection). (Besides the four passages in the main body of the text, see *PH* I 15 and 203.) In fact, as we see in the quoted texts, they are used synonymously or interchangeably. It may be said that experiencing a πάθος is to find oneself in a state or condition with a certain phenomenological content: its content is a φαινόμενον or a φαντασία to which one is forced to assent. Either the state in which one finds oneself determines that one has certain appearances, or it is having certain appearances that determines that one finds oneself in a given state. For more on the three terms in question, see Barnes (1990: 2621 n. 46), and Fine (2000: 90–91; 2003a: 352 n. 28, 359 n. 43; 2003b: 216 n. 20).

[26] The view that the Pyrrhonist would accept such propositions as true is not shared by all specialists. For a defense of this view, see Fine (2000, 2003b: sect. 6) and Perin (2010a: chap. 3; 2010b). For the opposite view, see Stough (1969: 142–145; 1984: 142–144), Burnyeat (1982: 25–26; 1997: 30–31), and Johnsen (2001: 522 n. 2). Cf. Mates (1996: 53–55).

phenomenology in the sense that the way one is affected or appeared to is both infallible and indubitable (see note 10 above).

It is true that Sextus never explicitly claims "that the skeptic can be *certain* of 'appearing'-statements or that he *knows* his own experiences [πάθη]" (Burnyeat, 1982: 27; see also Burnyeat, 1997: 41 n. 31; Barnes, 1990: 2626 n. 63). Still, there are three passages that can be taken to support the interpretation that Sextus thinks that skeptics do have knowledge of the way they are affected or appeared to. First, at *PH* I 215 he examines some unidentified people's view that Cyrenaicism and Pyrrhonism are identical inasmuch as the former "too says that only the affections are apprehended (τὰ πάθη μόνα […] καταλαμβάνεσθαι)." Two facts are suggestive. The use of καί ('too') at the beginning of the phrase seems to indicate that the Pyrrhonists themselves made that claim. However, given that Sextus is here reporting the view of those who took Cyrenaicism to be the same as Pyrrhonism, we cannot rule out the possibility that these anonymous people misinterpreted the Pyrrhonists' stance. Note, though, that when Sextus discusses the differences between the two stances, he does not mention as one of the differences the fact that the Pyrrhonists do not claim to apprehend their own affections.[27]

The remaining two passages are found in the section of the first book of *PH* devoted to the skeptical phrases. When Sextus explains the meaning of πάντα ἐστὶν ἀκατάληπτα ("All things are inapprehensible") at *PH* I 200 and of ἀκαταληπτῶ ("I have no apprehension") and οὐ καταλαμβάνω ("I do not apprehend") at *PH* I 201, he points out that these phrases apply to the non-evident things that are being investigated. One could then infer from this that the evident things that are not a matter of investigation—i.e., the φαντασίαι—are apprehended by the skeptic.[28]

Note also that Diogenes Laertius tells us that the Pyrrhonists claim to know only the affections (μόνα […] τὰ πάθη γινώσκομεν) (DL IX 103). From this it does not of course follow that Sextus is among the Pyrrhonists in question. In addition, I can imagine someone arguing that we cannot entirely exclude the possibility that Diogenes is loosely reporting on what the Pyrrhonists actually said. But it is suggestive that the expression he employs to describe the Pyrrhonian stance (μόνα […] τὰ πάθη γινώσκομεν) is quite close to the one used by Sextus to describe the Cyrenaic stance (τὰ πάθη μόνα […] καταλαμβάνεσθαι). In fact, in the passages in question I think that καταλαμβάνεσθαι and γινώσκειν could well be used interchangeably. It may also be worth noting that, as we will see below, Galen employs γινώσκειν to talk about the rustic Pyrrhonists' claim to lack knowledge of their own πάθη. Now, if Diogenes's report is accurate, then (i) there were at least some Pyrrhonists who thought they had knowledge of the way they were affected or appeared to, (ii) it makes sense that some found an important affinity between Pyrrhonism and

[27] See Fine (2000: 98 n. 57; 2003a: 379–380; 2003b: 208) and Perin (2010a: 68; 2010b: 160). *Contra* Naess (1968: 19).

[28] It must be remarked that the skeptic accepts what is evident, but not as an epistemic criterion inasmuch as he suspends judgment about any claim that purports to describe immediately what things are really like or from which one thinks one can infer what things are really like. See Machuca (2011: 167–171).

Cyrenaicism, and (iii) the interpretation of *PH* I 215, based—I admit—mainly on an *argumentum ex silentio*, receives some external confirmation.[29]

One's current conscious phenomenology is not merely something that Sextus does not explicitly call into question, but something he seems to explicitly exclude from questioning. He appears to assume that it is not possible to doubt, or be mistaken about, one's own ongoing conscious experience, and hence that his judgments about how he is appeared to are aligned with the appearances he actually has. His skeptical stance is surely radical—as least on my interpretation of it—but not as radical as it could have been had his suspension of judgment extended to the reports on his own appearances. It might be argued that one of the reasons for this is that he thought that calling what appears into question would undermine the skeptic's criterion of action. There is, however, no reason why that would be so: the skeptic could base his decisions on the way he thinks he is appeared to whether or not he really is appeared to that way. Just as he can make choices on the basis of how he is appeared to regardless of whether the external object (if any there is) is as it appears to be, so too can he make choices on the basis of the way he thinks he is appeared to regardless of whether the way he thinks he is appeared to corresponds to the way he actually is appeared to.

Should we therefore conclude that the ancient Pyrrhonists did not come up with the kind of reasons that have led certain contemporary philosophers to doubt that we have reliable introspective access to our current conscious experience? Though Sextus falls short of calling into question his knowledge of the way he is affected or appeared to, there is textual evidence that there was a group of ancient Pyrrhonists who refrained from making assertions or knowledge claims about their own affections or appearances. In a passage from *De differentia pulsuum*, Galen briefly talks about a group of skeptics, called "rustic Pyrrhonists," who claim not to know their own πάθη. This passage is frequently referred to, but as far as I know it has never been quoted *in extenso* and its context has never been explained. Galen is reviewing the definitions of pulse proposed by the different medical schools and, at one point, he refers to the Empiricists. If my interpretation of the passage is correct, Galen distinguishes two groups of Empiricists, namely, those who are influenced by the Pyrrhonists and those who are more moderate. The latter accept to call 'pulse' the perceptible motion that appears in certain parts of the body when one is alive and think that saying this is safer than talking about diastole and systole. Then Galen adds:

> But others, shier than those, say that for them [the pulse] is the perception of the specific affections of touch, afraid to affirm that any of the external things is real, [a view] to which they are led by the approach of those who are called "skeptics" and "aporetics." We must therefore leave these aside, for perhaps they will not even dare to affirm that a motion appears to them, if they were going to obey the aporetics in everything. At any rate, some of these—whom they rightly call "rustic Pyrrhonists"—say that they do not even know their own affections with certainty. But passing to those who acknowledge to believe that they

[29] I should note that I do not think that arguments from silence are *per se* unsound (see Machuca, 2020: 448).

> see evidently a motion underneath the skin of some body that extends in length, breath, and depth—for they are more moderate than the others—we will exhort them, after removing the skin either by our choice or by chance, to examine what it is that appears to move underneath it. (VIII 710–711, in Kühn, 1824)[30]

One group of Empirical doctors is influenced by the skeptics or aporetics, who are divided into two groups, both of which refrain from making claims about external things. One of these groups seems to accept that we can make claims about our own affections or what appears to us, whereas the other group, the rustic Pyrrhonists, refrains from making even such claims. The reason is that they do not think they know their own affections with certainty (βεβαίως γινώσκειν). The stance of the first group is in consonance with the stance Diogenes explicitly ascribes to the Pyrrhonists and with the stance Sextus not so explicitly adopts *in propria persona*. The rustic Pyrrhonist, by contrast, does not believe that he has privileged access to the way he is appeared to or the way he is affected. For this reason, he refrains from claiming that what appears to him does appear to him in the way the proposition expressing the appearance says it appears to him, or that he is affected in the way the proposition expressing the affection says he is affected. Now, I think that the rustic Pyrrhonist would accept that, even if he cannot make claims (ἀποφήνασθαι) about the way he is affected or appeared to inasmuch as he does not have certain knowledge of his own affections or appearances, he can report (ἀπαγγέλλειν) on those affections or appearances (cf. *PH* I 4, 15, 197, 203). For doing so is compatible with the possibility that one's reports are mistaken.[31] Be that as it may, what is

[30] Here is the Greek text: ἕτεροι δὲ τούτων ἀτολμότεροι τῶν ἰδίων παθῶν τῆς ἀφῆς αἴσθησιν αὐτοῖς εἶναί φασι, δεδιότες ἀποφήνασθαι περί τινος τῶν ἐκτὸς ὡς ὑπάρχοντος, ἐκ τῆς τῶν σκεπτικῶν καὶ ἀπορητικῶν ὀνομαζομένων ἀγωγῆς ἐπὶ τοῦτό γε ἠγμένοι. τούτους μὲν οὖν ἀπολειπτέον ἡμῖν ἐστιν. ἴσως γὰρ οὐδ' ὅτι φαίνεταί τις αὐτοῖς κίνησις ἀποφήνασθαι τολμήσουσιν, εἰ τὰ πάντα πείθοιντο τοῖς ἀπορητικοῖς. ἐκείνων γοῦν ἔνιοι φασὶν οὐδὲ τὰ σφῶν αὐτῶν πάθη βεβαίως γινώσκειν, οὓς καλοῦσιν εἰκότως ἀγροικοπυῤῥωνείους. ἐπὶ δὲ τοὺς ὁμολογοῦντας πεπεῖσθαι κίνησιν ὁρᾷν ἐναργῶς ὑπὸ τῷ δέρματι σῶμα τός τινος εἰς μῆκος καὶ πλάτος καὶ βάθος ἐκτεινομένου μεταβάντες, ἐπειδὴ μετριώτεροι τῶν ἄλλων εἰσὶ, παρακαλέσομεν αὐτοὺς διαιρεθέντος τοῦ δέρματος, ἢ κατὰ τὴν ἡμετέραν προαίρεσιν, ἢ κατὰ τύχην ποτὲ, σκέψασθαι, τί ποτ' ἐστὶ τὸ φαινόμενον ὑπ' αὐτῷ κινεῖσθαι.

[31] It is worth noting that Galen also mentions the rustic Pyrrhonists in *De praecognitione* (= *De praenotione ad Posthumum*). He tells us that, when he was getting ready to show by dissection how the voice is produced, the Peripatetic Alexander of Damascus asked: "Would this be granted to you beforehand: that we must believe the things that appear through the senses (τοῖς διὰ τῶν αἰσθήσεων φαινομένοις πιστεύειν ἡμᾶς δεῖν)?" Here is Galen's reaction: "Having heard this, I went away, leaving them behind and saying only one thing: that I had been mistaken in thinking that I was not coming [to meet] rustic Pyrrhonists, or I would not have come (ὡς ἐσφάλην οἰόμενος οὐκ εἰς τοὺς ἀγροικοπυρρωνείους ἥκειν, ἢ οὐκ ἂν ἀφικνεῖσθαι)" (XIV 628, in Kühn, 1827). According to this passage, the rustic Pyrrhonists refrain from claiming that perceptual φαινόμενα reveal how things really are. Is this stance compatible with that found in the passage from *De differentia pulsuum*? I think it is. The *De praecognitione* passage says that the rustic Pyrrhonist calls into question the claim that the way *x* perceptually appears to S corresponds (at least in normal conditions) to the way *x* really is, or to put it more cautiously, that the way S is perceptually appeared to corresponds to the way something that is beyond the appearances really is. This stance is compatible with that found in the *De differentia pulsuum* passage even though, as it stands, it falls short of it. For it is

relevant for present purposes is that, based on Galen's testimony, we know that there was a brand of ancient Pyrrhonism that did call into question our knowledge of our own current conscious phenomenology, even though unfortunately we cannot say what reasons they advanced for refraining from making assertions or knowledge claims about how they were affected or appeared to. Regarding the scope of Sextus's skepticism, it is not farfetched to think that the stance Galen ascribes to the rustic Pyrrhonists is the stance that Sextus would have adopted had he been pressed on whether one can indeed know one's own affections or appearances with certainty, or had he had access to some of the experimental studies reviewed in the present chapter. In any case, that is the stance adopted by the neo-Pyrrhonist.

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plain that the reason the rustic Pyrrhonist remarks (i) that he does not *even* have secure knowledge of his own affections is that (ii) he takes himself not to have secure knowledge of the alleged causes of those affections. In fact, (ii) is the stance found in the first sentence of the passage from *De differentia pulsuum*, where it is said that the Empiricists influenced by the skeptics remark that the pulse "is the perception of the specific affections of touch, afraid to affirm that any of the external things is real." Whereas (ii) is the skeptical stance found in most sources, (i) is a more radical stance that is nonetheless compatible with (ii). Let me finally note that, at *An in Arteriis Natura Sanguis Contineatur* IV 722 (in Kühn, 1822), Galen refers to "the Pyrrhonian rusticity" (τὴν Πυρρωνείαν ἀγροικίαν), but this passage is not relevant to the question that interests us here.

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Chapter 9
The Disagreeing About Disagreement Argument

Abstract A serious objection that has been raised to conciliationism, and particularly to the Equal Weight View, is that it is self-defeating or self-undermining. The reason is that its proponent is forced to give equal weight to it and to the opposite view in the event that one of his epistemic peers disagrees with him about the truth of the Equal Weight View, with the result that his confidence in this view is undermined. The same objection could be raised to Pyrrhonism in an attempt to show that across-the-board suspension of judgment is self-defeating. The purpose of this chapter is to explore the kind of response a neo-Pyrrhonist could offer to the self-defeat objection.

Keywords Doxastic attitude · Equal Weight View · Higher-order account of suspension · Psychological disposition · Self-defeat · Self-refutation

9.1 Introduction

As noted in Chap. 6, there is at present a vigorous debate about which doxastic attitude one is rationally required to adopt when involved in a disagreement with a putative epistemic peer. We saw that the two main positions that have been defended in the literature are conciliationism and steadfastness. Roughly put, whereas conciliationists claim that all the parties to a peer dispute should significantly revise their beliefs, steadfasters maintain that, upon learning about a peer's disagreement, one can often retain one's belief with a degree of confidence that is either identical or close to one's initial degree of confidence. A serious charge that has been leveled against conciliationism, and particularly against the Equal Weight View (EWV), is that it is self-defeating or self-undermining. The reason is that its proponent is forced to give equal weight to it and to the opposite view in the event that one of his epistemic peers disagrees with him about the truth of the EWV, with the result that his confidence in this view is undermined. I call this charge "the disagreeing about disagreement argument" (DDA). This argument could also be directed against Pyrrhonian skepticism in an attempt to show that across-the-board suspension of

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judgment is self-defeating. The purpose of this chapter is to explore the kind of response a neo-Pyrrhonist could offer to the DDA.

In Sect. 9.2, I present the DDA in more detail and examine whether it is a type of self-refutation argument. In Sect. 9.3, I review what I take to be the chief responses that have been proposed in defense of the EWV and conciliationism more generally, and I explain why none of them is the kind of response a neo-Pyrrhonist would offer. In Sect. 9.4, I propose a neo-Pyrrhonian response to the DDA. In Sect. 9.5, I address six objections that could be raised to the neo-Pyrrhonian response to the DDA and explain why they miss the mark. In Sect. 9.6, I summarize the results of the foregoing analyses.

9.2 The Self-Defeat Charge

As explained in Chap. 6, the EWV is the conciliationist stance according to which, in the face of a peer disagreement, one should give equal weight to the belief of one's peer and to one's own belief when there is no reason to prefer one belief to the other that is independent of the disagreement itself. We saw that, whereas some conciliationists understand the idea of giving equal weight to both beliefs in the sense that the disagreeing peers should suspend judgment about the matter under dispute, others understand it in the sense that they should split the difference in the degrees of confidence in their respective beliefs.

The DDA is a serious objection that has been raised particularly to the EWV and that, it seems, could also be raised to the neo-Pyrrhonist's across-the-board suspension of judgment. According to that argument, if the proponent of the EWV finds out that an epistemic peer believes the EWV to be false, then he should give to this belief the same weight as he gives to his own belief in the truth of the EWV and, hence, either suspend judgment about its truth or split the difference in the degrees of confidence with which he and his opponent hold their respective beliefs. The EWV is therefore self-defeating or self-undermining because, in order to propose it as the rationally required response to peer disagreement, its proponent must be confident that it is true, in which case he is nonetheless required to significantly lower his confidence in its truth inasmuch as he knows that there is an epistemic peer who rejects it.[1] The advocate of the EWV is thus rationally bound by the EWV itself to lose confidence in it. If it were argued that the EWV applies to every peer disagreement except the one about its own correctness, it would be objected that this is an arbitrary move unless one offers a reason why, from the viewpoint of the EWV itself, conciliation is not required in the specific case of that peer disagreement. And

[1] By significantly lowering his confidence in the truth of the EWV, it seems that the proponent of this view is no longer rationally required to give so much weight to the belief of steadfasters. His confidence in the truth of the EWV could then increase on the basis of the reasons that originally led him to adopt that view, but this means that he will again be rationally required to give considerable weight to the belief of steadfasters. He thus seems to be in a very unstable position.

if it were argued that the EWV was formulated only in relation to first-order peer disputes and, hence, only applies to them, the question would arise why it cannot be applied also to second-order peer disputes; and if no compelling reason were provided, then the restriction in question would again seem arbitrary.[2]

In a similar way, it could be argued that, when the neo-Pyrrhonist finds out that most people believe that we should not suspend judgment in the face of most disagreements, he should, after considering this higher-order disagreement, suspend judgment about whether he should suspend judgment. Otherwise, his suspension about all the matters into which he has inquired would not really be global, for there would be a disagreement he is able to resolve: he has come to the conclusion that he is rationally required to suspend judgment in the face of all the other disagreements he has so far considered. He is thus faced with a dilemma: either he redefines the scope of his suspension by restricting it to most disagreements—in which case he would have to justify the legitimacy of such a restriction—or he defeats his own stance by recommending a view about whose truth he is compelled to suspend judgment. There is one respect in which the situation described by the DDA could be regarded as not completely foreign to Sextus. For although most of the time he examines disagreements from a third-person perspective inasmuch as the Pyrrhonist is not part of those disagreements, he sometimes refers to disagreements of which the Pyrrhonist seems to be part: while some affirm that *p* and others that not-*p*, skeptics suspend judgment about whether *p*.[3] Sextus is thus aware that others think that the Pyrrhonist is mistaken in suspending judgment about whether *p*, even though he does not seem to be aware that, on the basis of that fact, one can construct an argument like the DDA.

A key question is whether the DDA is a self-refutation argument, i.e., whether it intends to show that the EWV or Pyrrhonism are self-refuting. As Castagnoli (2010: 3–4) points out, we do not find in the contemporary literature an agreed-upon definition or account of self-refutation. But one can say, roughly, that a self-refutation argument is an argument that intends to show that a given item (typically a proposition) is, by way of some form of self-reference or self-application, falsified or

[2] To the best of my knowledge, the DDA was first advanced by Plantinga against religious pluralism (2000a: 178–179; 2000b: 446–453). O'Connor (1999: 85–87), too, uses it against religious pluralism. The argument has more recently been developed at length against the EWV and other forms of conciliationism by Weatherson (2013), Decker (2014), and Grundmann (2021). The objection that conciliationist views are self-defeating is also raised by Bergmann (2009: 348 with n. 21), Taliaferro (2009: 226–227), Enoch (2010: 962 n. 19), Sosa (2010: 279), Thune (2010: 371), and Weintraub (2013: 742). Decker and Groll (2013), Horn (2017), and Sampson (2019) level the self-defeat charge against arguments from moral disagreement that rely on conciliationism—although Sampson thinks that other familiar arguments from moral disagreement are vulnerable to that charge. Mulligan (2015), despite endorsing conciliationism, claims that conciliationists face three other forms of self-defeat when dealing with situations in which putative epistemic peers disagree about epistemic peerhood itself.

[3] See, e.g., *PH* II 18, 31, 180, III 23, 65, 119; *AD* II 327–328, 380, III 195, IV 45–49.

unbelievable or unassertable.[4] My analysis of the kind of self-refutation at issue in the DDA relies on a distinction between different types of self-refutation drawn from Mackie (1964), McPherran (1987), and Castagnoli (2010).

The taxonomy in question includes absolute, pragmatic, *ad hominem*, and operational self-refutation. *Absolute self-refutation* occurs when the content of a proposition falsifies the proposition: e.g., the propositions "All propositions are false" or "It can be proved that nothing can be proved," if assumed to be true, imply their own falsehood and therefore cannot be true. *Pragmatic self-refutation* occurs when the actual way in which a proposition is presented falsifies the proposition: e.g., if the proposition "I am not saying anything" is expressed by saying it, or the proposition "I am not writing anything" is expressed by writing it, then they are falsified by the very way in which they are presented. *Ad hominem self-refutation* occurs when the intended way in which a proposition is presented—i.e., the way in which it is intended to be presented by the person who presents it—is inconsistent with the content of the proposition.[5] For example, if the proposition "No proof exists" is asserted because it is taken by the speaker to be the conclusion of a proof, or the proposition "Sensory evidence is unreliable" is asserted because it is taken by the speaker to be the conclusion of a sound argument one of whose premises depends on the reliability of sensory evidence, then intending to offer such a proof or argument is inconsistent with the content of the proposition.[6] It has been argued that, even though in these cases the speaker is conceding *malgré lui* the falsehood of the proposition, there is no actual falsification of the proposition because, despite what the speaker believes, it is not possible to offer such a proof or argument—whereas it is possible, e.g., to write "I am not writing anything." Finally, *operational self-refutation* occurs when what is implied by asserting a proposition contradicts the asserted content: e.g., if one asserts the proposition "No proposition is true," one commits oneself to the truth of this proposition, for an assertion is a commitment to the truth of the asserted proposition. The operationally self-refuting proposition may in some cases be true, but it cannot be asserted.

The DDA does not claim that the EWV or Pyrrhonism are absolutely self-refuting, for it does not claim that the content of the propositions that express these stances falsifies the propositions. Nor does the DDA affirm that such stances are pragmatically self-refuting, for nothing in the way the propositions that express them are presented falsifies these propositions. The DDA does not maintain that such stances are self-refuting in an *ad hominem* way either, for there is nothing in the intended way in which such stances are presented that is inconsistent with the

[4] That the item in question is unbelievable or unassertable is of course to be understood in the sense that it cannot be *consistently* or *justifiably* believed or asserted.

[5] This kind of self-refutation argument is *ad hominem* because the person who puts it forward makes use of his opponent's own views.

[6] These cases of *ad hominem* self-refutation must be distinguished from those in which one asserts "There is a proof that nothing can be proved" and "There is reliable sensory evidence that no sensory evidence is reliable" both because in these cases the content of the propositions is falsified and because it is falsified by the very same content.

content of the propositions that express them. Finally, the DDA does not affirm that such stances are operationally self-refuting, for asserting the propositions that express them does not falsify the content of the propositions. Rather, the DDA claims that the EWV or Pyrrhonism cannot be justifiably believed or legitimately asserted in the face of a specific situation, namely, when someone calls into question their correctness or would call it into question if asked. There is self-reference or self-application here, for in such a situation the EWV or Pyrrhonism would be undermined in virtue of the attitude that they themselves say should be adopted whenever one finds oneself in a situation of that very kind. Hence, the DDA does not affirm that the propositions that express the EWV or Pyrrhonism are false, but that, in a given dialectical context, they should be applied to themselves, with the result that they cannot be justifiably believed or legitimately asserted. The DDA does not concern the truth-value of those propositions, but which doxastic attitude one can or cannot justifiably adopt towards them. Whether the self-reference or self-application in question amounts to self-refutation depends on whether one accepts that some self-refutation arguments are intended to show that a given proposition cannot be justifiably believed or legitimately asserted.

It is worth noting that the DDA exhibits what Castagnoli (2010) describes as the characteristic of the ancient charge of περιτροπή ("turning round," "overturning," "reversal"), a term usually translated as "self-refutation" because the notion it expresses is the closest to our notion of self-refutation. According to Castagnoli, in ancient Western philosophy self-refutation was not regarded as a logical property of certain propositions considered in isolation, and self-refutation arguments were not logical proofs designed to establish, *in vacuo*, the necessary falsehood of those propositions. Rather, the charge of self-refutation was at least most of the time an intrinsically dialectical maneuver, for it was leveled in a dialectical context in which a claim was advanced, then attacked by an opponent (or even by oneself *in foro interno*), then defended against the attack, and so on. The purpose of the charge was to show that a given claim, even if true, could not be successfully advanced and defended in debate because of the unavoidable consequences to which, in such a dialectical exchange, its proponent was committed: by advancing and defending *p* in debate, its proponent was either immediately or ultimately committing himself to not-*p*, thereby being forced to admit defeat. One could then argue that there is a fifth type of self-refutation that should be labeled 'dialectical',[7] and that the DDA is a dialectical self-refutation argument. Whether or not we are willing to accept this further category of self-refutation argument is not important for present purposes. What is important is that, even though the EWV or Pyrrhonism are not self-refuting in any of the four ways described above and even though the DDA does not show that they are false, it is still a real problem for those stances if they are indeed self-undermining or self-defeating in the sense that they cannot be justifiably believed or legitimately asserted, given what they themselves claim, against someone who either challenges them or would challenge them if asked. So, the DDA seems to

[7] Cf. Burnyeat (1976: 59) and Castagnoli (2010: 99–100).

pose a serious epistemic challenge both to proponents of the EWV and to neo-Pyrrhonists.[8]

9.3 Conciliationist Replies to the DDA

The first conciliationist responses to the DDA found in the literature are rather brief. In reply to Plantinga's use of the argument against religious pluralism, Richard Feldman (2003: 89–90 with n. 4) maintains that the arguments against this view are unsuccessful, and so the exclusivist's reasons for rejecting it are not as good as the pluralist's reasons for endorsing it. If Feldman is right, then equal weight should not be given to the conflicting beliefs about the correctness of the conciliationist principle defended by pluralists. Tomás Bogardus (2009: 332–333; 2013: 223–224) argues that the EWV does not apply to the dispute between the conciliationist and the steadfaster because they are not epistemic peers, for the latter lacks the rational intuition that enables the former to just see the truth of the EWV. In his first, succinct discussion of the DDA, David Christensen (2009: 762–763) acknowledges that his view is potentially self-undermining, since it undermines itself under certain evidential circumstances—in the present case, when he realizes that some of his epistemic peers reject the view. However, he thinks that conciliationists should not be seriously worried about this because it is not a problem restricted to their view, but common to any view on disagreement that is not radically steadfast.

Adam Elga (2010) is the first to have offered a detailed response to the DDA. He claims that this argument is fatal against anyone who embraces across-the-board conciliationism, but that it does not represent a problem for partially conciliatory views, such as his own and those advocated by Christensen and Feldman. The reason is that, like any other fundamental policy, rule, or method, such views, in order to be consistent, must be dogmatic regarding their own correctness. Elga thinks that this move is not arbitrary or *ad hoc* because the restriction in question is precisely what makes his view partly conciliatory, and because this kind of restriction is a common feature of many views about a wide range of topics.

In a later and fuller discussion of what he calls the "Inconsistency Argument"—which is similar to the DDA—Christensen points out that the argument can also be directed against moderately steadfast views (2013: 85). Proponents of these views recognize that peer disagreement does affect one's degree of credence in one's original position about the disputed issue, but claim that in at least many cases one need not compromise much because of the strength of the epistemic reasons for one's original position. However, insofar as there is some degree of compromise, one's

[8] Graves (2013), Littlejohn (2013: 174–178), and Matheson (2015a: 149–158; 2015b) defend the EWV by arguing that the fact that it is self-undermining when challenged does not provide any basis for claiming that it is false or incorrect. But while Graves and Littlejohn fail to realize that that fact by itself raises a significant epistemic challenge to the EWV, Matheson at least recognizes that it "might be unpleasant" (2015b: 156).

moderately steadfast view will require one to become less confident in it. Moreover, not only any view of disagreement that is not completely steadfast but any view that allows for some degree of epistemic modesty will fall prey to the DDA. Although, as in his 2009 paper, Christensen regards this as providing "a serious reason to be suspicious of the argument" (2013: 86), he proposes a different response to it based on what he calls "the conflicting-ideals view" (2013: 92–93). According to this view, our rational ideals come into conflict particularly in those circumstances in which "one gets good evidence against the correctness of what are in fact the correct ideals," which however does not mean that any of them is incorrect, but only that "one will end up violating some ideal or other, no matter what one ends up believing" (2013: 91). Christensen recognizes that the conflicting-ideals view is not "entirely comfortable" (2013: 92) but claims that the motivation for it is independent of the attempt to reply to the DDA. For it is also motivated by those many cases in which one correctly assesses the first-order evidence—e.g., by realizing that *p* is entailed by, or is the best explanation for, the first-order evidence—but then receives strong higher-order evidence against the correctness of that assessment. In such cases, by complying with the rational ideal that consists in respecting the higher-order evidence, one violates the rational ideal that consists in respecting logic or inference to the best explanation. As for conciliationism, it rests on two ideals: respecting evidence of one's epistemic errors and level-connection. According to the first ideal, when "one encounters good evidence that one's initial level of confidence in P is higher than that supported by one's first-order evidence […], one will give significant credence to the claim that one's initial level of credence is too high" (2013: 91). The second ideal requires that "one's confidence in P be constrained by one's beliefs about what level of confidence the evidence supports" (2013: 91). Christensen's reply to the DDA is the following.[9] If, when faced with the peer disagreement over his view, the conciliationist lowers his confidence in the correctness of that view and keeps conciliating on other things, he will respect the evidence of his error, but will violate the level-connecting ideal because he will be conciliating while doubting that conciliating is rational. Alternatively, if he retains full confidence in the correctness of his view despite the peer disagreement over it and keeps conciliating on other things, he will respect the level-connecting ideal, but will disregard the evidence of his error with respect to his belief in conciliationism. He is thus faced with violating one ideal or the other. Now, it seems that it is not only possible but also rational for the conciliationist to cling to his view even if doing so implies violating one of the two rational ideals on which it is based.

One last reply to the DDA that I will consider is that proposed by John Pittard.[10] He maintains that conciliationists are committed "to showing epistemic deference that is proportionate to the epistemic qualifications of different thinkers," a

[9] Thanks to David Christensen for feedback here.

[10] For other replies to the DDA, see Frances (2010: 455–459), Graves (2013), Littlejohn (2013: 174–178), Matheson (2015a: 149–158; 2015b), and Reining (2016). Kornblith (2013: 274–275) briefly considers the DDA as directed against his conciliationist view on the entrenched disagreements that abound in philosophy and recognizes that he cannot offer a reply. Christensen (2021)

commitment that "supports reducing confidence in *most* disagreements with qualified thinkers," but not "in disagreements over the merits of this basic conciliatory commitment" (2015: 449). The reason is that one can show epistemic deference at two different levels, namely, the level of one's credences and the level of one's reasoning. When faced with an epistemic peer who rejects conciliationism, if the conciliationist gives equal weight to his and his peer's initial credences in conciliationism, he shows equal deference at the credence level, but not at the reasoning level inasmuch as his lowered credence in conciliationism is based on a conciliatory reasoning that his peer finds illegitimate. Alternatively, if the conciliationist does not lower his credence in conciliationism, his response is not deferential to his peer at the credence level but is fully deferential at the reasoning level inasmuch as, when setting his credence for conciliationism, he does not give any weight to the conciliatory reasoning contested by his peer. Hence,

> when I encounter a disagreement over the merits of conciliationism, reducing my credence is not obviously more deferential than remaining steadfast. […] And since there is no evident reason for privileging deference at either the credence level or the reasoning level, it seems that the conciliatory commitment to epistemic deference does not supply a reason for favouring any particular response to a disagreement over conciliationism. Conciliatory commitments yield no determinate prescription in this case, leaving me free to base my credence for conciliationism entirely on other evidential and rational factors. (2015: 450)

Thus, given that the conciliationist may pursue either path, a commitment to epistemic deference "does not provide a rational basis for reducing confidence in conciliationism when that view is disputed" (2015: 443).

None of the above replies to the DDA is the kind of response a neo-Pyrrhonist would offer if confronted with that argument. Feldman's reply is not acceptable to the neo-Pyrrhonist because the latter finds pluralist and exclusivist arguments equally credible. Unlike Bogardus, the neo-Pyrrhonist does not attempt to justify his stance by appealing to intuition, since there is disagreement about what intuition is and particularly about whether we can use intuition to justify our beliefs. One need only consider the current intense debate about the reliability of intuition between analytic epistemologists and experimental philosophers. And more to the point of the present issue, the neo-Pyrrhonist would remark that steadfasters, too, may claim to have seen the truth of their view through intuition, in which case the debate between conciliationists and steadfasters reaches a deadlock. Unlike Christensen in his first response, the neo-Pyrrhonist does not believe that the severity of the problem is reduced by the mere fact that being potentially self-undermining is not a problem exclusive to conciliationism. If anything, this shows that it is a problem shared by several or many views. Regarding Elga's response, whereas his view is partially conciliatory, the neo-Pyrrhonist's suspension is global, since he withholds judgment on all the matters he has so far investigated. Also, as with Christensen's first reply, Elga's appeal to the fact that many kinds of views avoid the self-undermining objection by being dogmatic about their own correctness would

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has offered a new reply to the DDA, which unfortunately came to my attention just as the final version of this book was about to be sent off to the publisher.

not convince the neo-Pyrrhonist, who would ask whether that fact does not rather show that a large number of views make an arbitrary and questionable move.

With respect to Christensen's second response to the DDA, the neo-Pyrrhonist would not endorse it because it is based on a commitment to the requirements of rationality. But he would regard that response as most interesting in that it embodies a straightforward recognition of what strikes him as the aporetic aspect of rationality: by fully and conscientiously following the requirements of rationality or "the rational ideals," one ends up in a situation of *aporia* in which those requirements or ideals come into conflict with one another and it is not clear how such a conflict is to be settled. Indeed, how are we supposed to decide which rational ideal to follow when a conflict of ideals arises? As far as I can see, Christensen does not offer an answer to this question, and to my mind there is an unacknowledged skeptical flavor to his position.

The neo-Pyrrhonist would make similar remarks about Pittard's reply to the DDA. He would first observe that he has no doxastic commitment to epistemic deference because he suspends judgment about epistemic requirements of this kind given the disagreements over them that he has so far been unable to resolve. He would also point out that, on Pittard's view, there appears to be an inescapable conflict between two ways of conforming to epistemic deference, a conflict regarding which there does not seem to be a principled resolution and that may therefore be taken to reveal the aporetic nature of rationality. For although Pittard thinks that conciliationists can resolve such a conflict by having recourse to epistemic and rational factors that are independent of their conciliatory commitment, he does not specify what those factors are, and one may reasonably suppose that there is considerable disagreement both about what epistemic and rational factors are relevant and about how the chosen factors are to be applied to the resolution of the conflict in question.

9.4 A Neo-Pyrrhonian Response

So, what kind of response to the DDA could a neo-Pyrrhonist offer? Given the interpretation of Sextan Pyrrhonism proposed in the first part of this book—in particular, given the interpretation of Pyrrhonian suspension defended in Chap. 5—I think he could offer a three-stage response.

First, he would point out that his first-order agnosticism is not a view he endorses because he believes it is epistemically justified. Rather, his suspension is a state of mind in which, as a matter of psychological fact, he finds himself after assessing the arguments advanced by the parties to the first-order disagreements he has considered. For this reason, his finding out that other people believe that one should not suspend judgment in the face of most of those disagreements will not preclude him from suspending judgment. For, if the arguments pro and con the first-order question whether *p* continue to appear equally persuasive to him, he will, as a matter of psychological fact, continue to refrain from making assertions about that question.

Second, when confronted with the second-order disagreement between those who affirm that first-order suspension or considerable belief revision is always rationally required in the face of peer disagreement and those who deny this, the neo-Pyrrhonist finds himself compelled to suspend judgment. For he can assert neither that suspension is the correct doxastic attitude that one should adopt when confronted with first-order disputes between apparent epistemic peers, nor that there are effective strategies for settling most of those disputes. The arguments advanced by conciliationists and steadfasters strike him as equipollent. The neo-Pyrrhonist would, of course, also stress the fact that the dogmatists themselves are unable to reach agreement about what rationality demands, which seems to support his skeptical stance. Someone might object that, in suspending judgment in the face of this second-order dispute, the neo-Pyrrhonist is in fact siding with the conciliationist. Once again, he would respond by saying that he suspends judgment, not because he believes that it is rationally required to give equal weight to the conflicting beliefs whenever there is a disagreement between apparent epistemic peers, but because, as a matter of psychological fact, he feels compelled to suspend judgment when he cannot settle a dispute due to the apparent equipollence of the conflicting beliefs.

Finally, if the proponent of the DDA were not convinced by the preceding remarks, the neo-Pyrrhonist would make a final move by asking: what should one do if, as a matter of fact, one cannot decide whether (i) the belief that *p*, or (ii) the belief that not-*p*, or (iii) suspension of judgment about whether *p* is the epistemically justified attitude one should adopt towards the question whether *p*? If the neo-Pyrrhonist applied the epistemic requirement that the proponent of the DDA himself endorses as correct, the neo-Pyrrhonist would conclude that second-order suspension is rationally required: one is required to suspend judgment if one is unable to decide whether (i), (ii), or (iii) is epistemically justified. The epistemic requirement in question is Rationally Required Suspension, which in Chap. 5 was formulated thus:

> It is rationally required to suspend judgment in the face of a disagreement that one is unable to resolve because of the apparent equipollence of the conflicting arguments.

If the neo-Pyrrhonist endorsed this epistemic requirement, he would believe that he is rationally required to suspend judgment because the arguments advanced by the parties to the first- and second-order disagreements he has so far considered strike him as equally persuasive. If the proponent of the DDA were to argue that the situation of symmetry and unresolvability does not obtain in the debate between conciliationists and steadfasters, and hence that suspension is not rationally required in this case, the neo-Pyrrhonist would kindly ask him to share the arguments that compellingly and non-question-beggingly establish that the view of one of the disagreeing parties is correct or epistemically justified. From the neo-Pyrrhonist's vantage point, conciliationists and steadfasters seem to have disclosed all the available relevant evidence and arguments, and to be aware of the pertinent conceptual analyses and distinctions. They engage in an elaborate dialectical exchange and neither side succeeds in persuading the other; they are all intellectually respected and

well-trained philosophers who do not come to an agreement, and it is not clear how such a dispute could be non-arbitrarily settled. If we compare any pair of philosophers, taking one from each camp, we might perhaps identify relevant epistemic differences, but this seems much less feasible if the comparison is between the two camps as a whole. To make matters worse, proponents of each view advocate different variants of both conciliationism and steadfastness. As an external onlooker on the debate about the epistemic significance of peer disagreement who has taken no stand on the matter and is looking for answers, the neo-Pyrrhonist witnesses two groups of seemingly intelligent, informed, and well-trained philosophers who fail to agree about what the arguments establish. Granting that at most the arguments of one of the groups are sound, this means that the members of the other group, despite their information, training, and intellectual skills, are unable to see the soundness of those arguments. The problem for the neo-Pyrrhonist is that the members of each camp claim that it is the members of the other camp who, notwithstanding being their epistemic peers, are unable to properly assess the soundness, or lack thereof, of the conflicting arguments. Hence, if pressed with the self-defeat charge, the neo-Pyrrhonist would shrug his shoulders with resignation and ask how he is supposed to adjudicate the debate in a way that could be considered non-question-begging by all the parties. Moreover, he would point out that, if he applied the epistemic requirements endorsed by the dogmatists, he would find himself in a situation of *aporia*. Indeed, in the face of disagreements between positions that strike one as equally justified, one is epistemically required to suspend judgment. Since the neo-Pyrrhonist finds himself in such a situation with respect to all the disagreements he has so far considered—including the disagreement between conciliationists and steadfasters—he is epistemically required to suspend judgment across-the-board. But, in so doing, he falls prey to the dialectical self-defeat charge: given that others claim that he should not suspend judgment in the face of most of those disagreements and given that he is unable to resolve this disagreement, he is epistemically required to suspend judgment about whether he is epistemically required to suspend judgment. If so, then he cannot justifiably believe that he is epistemically required to suspend judgment in the face of the disagreements he has so far considered.

9.5 Objections and Replies

I would now like to consider six objections that could be raised to the neo-Pyrrhonian response to the DDA and explain why they miss the mark.

First objection: in the third move of that response, the topic has switched back to epistemic requirements, instead of just psychological reports on the neo-Pyrrhonist's personal experience. The neo-Pyrrhonist's recommendation is, in the face of the second-order disagreement between conciliationists and steadfasters, to suspend judgment. But that is just what the conciliationist view recommends, and what got this view into the problem of self-defeat in the first place: in the face of disagreement about the conciliationist view itself, this view says that we should not believe it.

Reply: this objection misunderstands the *ad hominem* nature of the third move made by the neo-Pyrrhonist, since in this move he is not relying on an epistemic requirement that he himself endorses, but on one endorsed by the proponent of the DDA. The neo-Pyrrhonist asks the proponent of the DDA the following: given the epistemic requirement that you yourself endorse, how should one react when one is unable to resolve both first- and second-order disagreements owing to the seeming equipollence of the views defended by the disagreeing parties?

Second objection: the neo-Pyrrhonian response is not relevant to the contemporary debate, for by making no assertion about what is rationally required, the neo-Pyrrhonist seems to have changed the subject. The subject was: what should we say about certain views that seem to recommend against themselves in certain situations? But neo-Pyrrhonism makes no recommendations, and so cannot recommend against itself. So why think that the neo-Pyrrhonian response to the DDA is relevant to the subject at hand?

Reply: my aim in examining the kind of response a neo-Pyrrhonist could offer to the DDA is not to defend the EWV or conciliationism more generally, but to better understand his peculiar kind of skepticism. The DDA seems to be a compelling argument against conciliationism precisely because conciliationists, unlike neo-Pyrrhonists, recommend what they regard as an epistemically justified view on peer disagreement. So, in responding to the DDA the way he does, the neo-Pyrrhonist has indeed changed the subject, but only in the sense that he shows that, despite appearances to the contrary, the self-defeat charge can be leveled against his stance only if one misunderstands the *sui generis* character of his skepticism.

Third objection: in connection with the preceding objection, it should be noted that, while the EWV is a *normative* thesis and the DDA poses a *normative* problem, the neo-Pyrrhonian response to the DDA makes a *factual* point, and so it is not clear how this response bears on the normative problem.

Reply: once again, my aim has been to show that, even though one might be inclined to think that the DDA could also be legitimately directed against Pyrrhonism, this would be possible only if one misunderstood the nature of this form of skepticism by claiming that the Pyrrhonian skeptic believes that suspension is the attitude that one is rationally required to adopt when confronted with disagreements between equipollent positions. The normative problem posed by the DDA does not arise for the neo-Pyrrhonist because his suspension is not based on an epistemic requirement. If the proponent of the DDA does not deny that one can adopt a stance because one finds oneself psychologically forced to do so, then he may concede that Pyrrhonian skepticism as it has been interpreted in this book is not vulnerable to the charge of dialectical self-defeat.

Fourth objection: given that the neo-Pyrrhonist's stance is not an epistemological view, the neo-Pyrrhonist would not feel compelled to reply to the DDA. Offering a reply would imply, or be a recognition, that he endorses an epistemological view.

Reply: note, first, that in case someone thought that the DDA may be properly directed against Pyrrhonian skepticism, a neo-Pyrrhonist might want to make it clear why such an argument misses the mark when directed against his skeptical stance. Sextus constantly tries to dispel misunderstandings about the nature and

scope of Pyrrhonism. For instance, he takes great pains to distinguish Pyrrhonism from various positions with which it has been mistaken in order that one may understand more clearly the Pyrrhonian approach (*PH* I 210–241). One may suppose that he would likewise want to distinguish Pyrrhonism from the EWV (or conciliationism more generally) in case the two outlooks were taken to be remarkably similar. Second, even if no neo-Pyrrhonist would bother to respond to the DDA on the grounds that he is not putting forth an epistemological view, interpreters of Pyrrhonian skepticism might find it enlightening to examine the kind of reply a neo-Pyrrhonist could offer to such an argument.

Fifth objection: my interpretation faces the problem that suspension is a *doxastic* attitude in the sense that it involves, or is based on, a second-order belief about one's own epistemic standing, e.g., the belief that one neither believes nor disbelieves *p*, or the belief that suspension is the attitude one should adopt when confronted with equally strong reasons for and against *p*, or the belief that it is the attitude that is justified or warranted by one's evidence. This is the view adopted by those who endorse higher-order accounts of suspension.[11]

Reply: the neo-Pyrrhonist would first remark that the high-order account of suspension is controversial inasmuch as it has been rejected by some authors (e.g., Tillman, 2005; Friedman, 2013; Atkins, 2017). Hence, perhaps dogmatists should first reach an agreement on the issue before the objection in question may have real bite. The neo-Pyrrhonist would then remark that the higher-order account of suspension does not fit well with his suspensive attitude because, first, he does not suspend judgment because he believes that he does not believe or disbelieve *p*, but because he finds himself unable, as a matter of psychological fact, to hold any beliefs whatsoever about whether *p* due to the apparently equipollence of the arguments for and against *p*. And second, the neo-Pyrrhonist would remind us that he is not merely a first-order agnostic, but a meta-agnostic who suspends judgment about whether suspension is the attitude one is rationally required or epistemically justified to adopt in certain circumstances. Though I myself have referred several times to suspension as a doxastic attitude, I have done so only because it is the way it is commonly referred to in the literature. Strictly speaking, however, suspension as conceived of by the neo-Pyrrhonist is not *doxastic* inasmuch as he does not hold any of the above second-order beliefs. He does not hold any higher-order belief about his epistemic standing, but merely reports that he is, as a matter of fact, psychologically unable to make up his mind, unable to tell whether *p* is the case or not. It is worth noting here that Barnes (1990: 14–15) claims that the Pyrrhonist is part of a disagreement in attitude, which is the kind of disagreement in which the parties hold conflicting attitudes—namely, belief, disbelief, or suspension—towards the question whether *p*. Now, if to be part of a disagreement one must offer an answer to the question under examination (Bueno, 2013: 30–32), then one can take the parties to a disagreement in attitude to be offering answers to the question "What attitude

[11] Distinct versions of the higher-order account of suspension are endorsed by Russell (1999: 41), Crawford (2004: 226–227), Rosenkranz (2007: 58), Archer (2019: 79–82), Masny (2020: 5024), and Raleigh (2021).

should one adopt, given the available evidence, towards the question whether *p*?" The neo-Pyrrhonist does not offer an answer to this question inasmuch as he does not hold the second-order belief that suspension is the attitude best supported by the available evidence, but rather suspends judgment about whether that is the case. It therefore seems that he is not actually part of a disagreement in attitude.

Sixth objection: if the neo-Pyrrhonist does not take suspension of judgment to be the doxastic attitude that one is rationally required to adopt in the face of a disagreement between equipollent positions, then neo-Pyrrhonism is deprived of any philosophical interest, particularly to epistemologists. For when we read Sextus's writings, we are just reading an autobiographical report that contains no normative claims.

Reply: even though I think that it is undeniable that many will dismiss out of hand the Pyrrhonian stance as it has been portrayed here, nothing necessarily prevents people from finding Sextus's texts philosophically challenging and intriguing. For example, someone may believe that the epistemological arguments that Sextus expounds but does not endorse are sound, and that they show that it is impossible to justify our beliefs or to resolve disagreements. We should keep in mind that whether someone is convinced or persuaded by a given argument does not necessarily depend on whether the person who presents the argument is committed to its soundness. Also, someone may, despite deeming Pyrrhonism unpersuasive or far-fetched, find it philosophically stimulating in that it makes him consider more carefully, or in a new light, certain epistemological problems. Something of this sort is what explains the interest in Pyrrhonism among contemporary analytic epistemologists.

9.6 Conclusion

The DDA does not purport to show that the EWV or Pyrrhonism are false. Rather, it purports to show that, in a given dialectical context—when someone rejects them or would reject them if asked—they are self-defeating or self-undermining in the sense that they should be applied to themselves, with the result that they cannot be justifiably believed or legitimately asserted. I have argued that, even though the DDA might be effective against the EWV or conciliationism more generally, the neo-Pyrrhonist's stance is not dialectically self-defeating because he conceives of his suspension as a mental state forced on him rather than as a doxastic attitude he believes he is rationally required to adopt.

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Chapter 10
The Nature of Rationality

Abstract In this chapter, I set myself two tasks. The first is to assess whether the Pyrrhonist is (ir)rational from the perspective of distinct accounts of the nature of rationality that have been proposed in the contemporary literature on the theory of rationality. The second task is to review the positions of some modern-day authors who have called into question the universal applicability or validity of the law of non-contradiction and the inference rules *modus ponens* and *modus tollens*. In pursuing these two tasks, my aim is twofold. First, to make use of developments in contemporary philosophy to better understand Pyrrhonian skepticism. Second, to make the case that we may be required to adopt a Pyrrhonian attitude towards the requirements of rationality and its normativity.

Keywords Coherence · Dialetheism · Irrationality · Normativity · Proper functioning · Reasons · Requirements of rationality · Rules of inference · Executive virtue

10.1 Introduction

In Chap. 5, I offered an interpretation of the Pyrrhonist's use of reason and his attitude towards the requirements of rationality that is halfway between the rationalist and the anti-rationalist interpretations of Pyrrhonism. However, my analysis of Pyrrhonian rationality did not include a detailed examination of what it means to say that someone is rational or irrational or that his attitudes are rational or irrational. For this reason, one of the two tasks of this chapter is to assess whether the Pyrrhonist is (ir)rational from the perspective of distinct accounts of the nature of rationality that have been proposed in the contemporary literature on the theory of rationality. The second task is to review the positions of some modern-day authors who have called into question the universal applicability or validity of the law of non-contradiction and the inference rules *modus ponens* and *modus tollens*. In pursuing these two tasks, my aim is twofold. First, to make use of developments in contemporary philosophy to better understand Pyrrhonian skepticism. Second, to make the case that we may be required to adopt a Pyrrhonian attitude towards the

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requirements of rationality and its normativity, thereby having a further reason to think that neo-Pyrrhonism may be a live philosophical option.

In Sect. 10.2, I review some recent accounts of the nature of rationality. The tentative result of this survey is that it is possible to distinguish four main conceptions of rationality, though not all of them are incompatible. With that taxonomy in place, I examine, in Sect. 10.3, whether the Pyrrhonist should be deemed to be rational or irrational according to each of the four conceptions of rationality. In Sect. 10.4, I look at two views that have been defended by some contemporary philosophers, namely, that according to which there are some true contradictions and that according to which there are counterexamples to the validity of *modus ponens* and *modus tollens*. In Sect. 10.5, I offer some concluding remarks.

10.2 Conceptions of Rationality and the "Why Be Rational?" Question

What does rationality consist in? And is rationality normative? The first question asks what we mean when we say that someone is rational or irrational or that his attitudes are rational or irrational. The second question asks why we should be rational rather than irrational or why we should conform to the requirements of rationality—whatever rationality consists in. If rationality essentially involves, or is constituted by, certain requirements, norms, standards, or principles, then of course rationality is normative in that sense: those requirements, norms, standards, or principles tell us how we *should*, or *ought to*, respond. In this sense, etiquette or grammar are also normative. Someone could say to me: "You should wear a suit if you are going to a milonga to dance tango," or "In English, you should not end a sentence with a preposition." But what is being asked in the second question above is rather whether there are any authoritative or binding reasons to conform to the norms of rationality,[1] i.e., whether we are required to comply with what those norms require of us, whether we ought to respond in the ways those norms tell us we ought to respond. I am here assuming that the question of the normativity of rationality refers to whether rationality is strongly rather than weakly normative. That is to say, the question is whether, if rationality requires you to respond in a given way, you do not merely have *a* reason to respond in that way, but rather have *conclusive* or *decisive* reason to respond in that way. This is sometimes couched in terms of whether the normativity of rational requirements is *strict*.

In what follows, I will distinguish between what I regard as four distinct conceptions of rationality that can be found in the literature, expounding them as accurately as I can. Probably, I will not do full justice to the positions to be reviewed and will

[1] Most authors agree that asking whether rationality is normative amounts to asking whether there are any reasons to be rational. An exception is Wedgwood (2017), who contends that one should avoid talking of "reasons" when discussing the normativity of rationality.

leave out others that are worth examining. But my reason for considering contemporary accounts of rationality is not to provide a comprehensive overview of the literature, but rather to avail myself of new tools to better understand Pyrrhonism and to show that this form of skepticism might still be a live philosophical option in the face of certain debates.

The first conception of rationality to be considered maintains that rationality is a matter of holding coherent combinations of attitudes (beliefs, intentions, desires, etc.). Advocates of this position claim that there are requirements of structural rationality such as the following—although it is a matter of controversy how best to formulate them:

> *Enkrasia*: S is rationally required to intend to X if S believes that he ought to X.
>
> *Means-End*: S is rationally required to intend to X if S intends to Y and believes that X is a necessary means to Y.
>
> *Doxastic Enkrasia*: S is rationally required to believe that p if S believes that he has sufficient evidence that p.
>
> *Modus Ponens*: S is rationally required to believe that q if S believes that p and that $p \rightarrow q$.
>
> *Belief Consistency*: S is rationally required not to believe both that p and that $\neg p$.

John Broome (1999, 2005, 2007a, b, 2013) is probably the best-known defender of the view that rationality consists in holding attitudes that fit together in a coherent way. An objection to the view—to be considered below—that rationality consists in correctly responding to reasons that Broome repeatedly makes in his writings is what he calls "the quick objection." According to this objection, it may occur that even if one is rational, one's reasons require one to F but one does not believe that one's reasons require one to F and so one fails to F. For example, your food is contaminated, which is a reason for you not to eat it, but since you have no evidence that it is contaminated, you do not believe that it is and you eat it, without thereby being irrational. Hence, one is rational even though one does not correctly respond to the reason in question. With respect to the normativity of rationality, Broome first implicitly endorsed the view that rationality is normative (Broome, 1999), then moved on to adopt an agnostic stand on the matter (Broome, 2005, 2007a), and now seems to have gone back to his original view (Broome, 2013). For he takes rationality to be non-derivatively normative, which means that the very fact that rationality requires a given response is in itself a reason to respond in the required way (2013: 179, 204). He recognizes, though, that he has no argument in support of this view or no successful way of defending it (2013: 179, 193, 204).

According to a second conception of rationality, rationality consists in correctly responding to reasons. The reason-response account has recently been defended by Benjamin Kiesewetter (2017) and Errol Lord (2018). Kiesewetter's position can be summarized as follows. First, he holds that rationality requires us to correctly respond to the epistemically available reasons—which are all the reasons there are—and that what we ought to do is determined solely by those reasons. Second, he conceives of reasons in terms of evidence: the reasons epistemically available to us are those that are part of our body of evidence—understanding evidence as both

factive and internally accessible. Third, he contends that structural irrationality is to be explained in terms of requirements to respond to decisive available reasons: the requirement (not) to believe what one has decisive available reason (not) to believe, and the requirement (not) to intend what one has decisive available reason (not) to intend. He therefore denies that there are any structural rational requirements. In his view, incoherence among attitudes is not forbidden by rationality, but rather indicates that at least one of the attitudes involved is not sufficiently supported by the available reasons. Lastly, he maintains that rationality is normative, given that the reason-response requirements of rationality are necessarily supported by decisive reasons. The normativity of rationality is also seen in the fact that calling a person irrational is a form of criticism: one thinks that the person in question has made some sort of mistake that needs to be corrected insofar as he had decisive reason not to respond as he did. Criticism is grounded in the violation of a requirement that is deemed to be normative. This is what he calls "the criticism argument," which he formulates thus:

> (1) If A is rationally required to φ, then A would be criticizable for not φ-ing.
> (2) If A would be criticizable for not φ-ing, then A has decisive reason to φ.
> (3) Therefore, if A is rationally required to φ, then A has decisive reason to φ. (Kiesewetter, 2017: 25)

Lord's position is similar to Kiesewetter's inasmuch as the former maintains that "to be rational is to correctly respond to possessed objective normative reasons" (2018: 3), that whenever one holds incoherent attitudes one is failing to correctly respond to the reasons one possesses, and that rationality is normative.[2] Regarding this last point, he remarks that, if "what you are rationally required to do is what you possess decisive reasons to do and what you ought to do is what you possess decisive reasons to do, then the requirements of rationality *just are* the requirements you ought to comply with" (2018: 241). Like Kiesewetter, Lord also claims that, by being irrational, a person is open to criticism. One key difference between their positions is that Lord accepts, while Kiesewetter rejects, the distinction between two kinds of normative reasons for a person to act, believe, intend, and desire in certain ways: normative reasons about which a person knows nothing and normative reasons that a person possesses. As noted above, Kiesewetter maintains that the only normative reasons there are are those that are epistemically accessible to the subject.

A third conception of rationality is that according to which to be rational amounts, at least in part, to function properly. This view is endorsed by Joseph Raz (2005a, b, 2011). He maintains: "Rationality consists in part in proper functioning. People who fail to pursue the means to their ends display or manifest a form of malfunctioning criticisable as a form of irrationality" (2005a: 18). In certain passages, Raz appears to believe that one can be irrational either if one fails to conform to a reason or if one does not comply with structural requirements of rationality (2005a: 15; 2005b: 9, 12). In either case, one's rational capacities would be functioning

[2] Lord (2018: 210 n. 3) finds talk of the "normativity" of rationality confusing, preferring instead to talk of its "deontic significance."

improperly. Raz's view thus seems compatible with both the reason-response and the coherence conceptions of rationality. However, first, he remarks that failure to conform to reasons that apply to us does not suffice to ascribe irrationality to an agent, for the agent's rational powers might still be functioning properly, the failure being due to non-culpable mistakes and ignorance (2011: 95). Second, he explicitly distinguishes his view from that of Broome. For example, one may function properly by coming to believe a proposition on the basis of overwhelming evidence, be aware that the proposition contradicts other propositions one believes, and be unable to determine which of the other propositions one believes is false. In such a situation, one would function improperly if one abandoned any of one's current beliefs, but one would also function improperly if one did not add to them the new belief that is inconsistent with them (2011: 94).

With regard to the question of the normativity of rationality, Raz maintains that "there is no reason, and no need for a reason, to be rational" (Raz, 2011: 95). If I understand his view correctly, we do not need a reason to respond to the reasons we recognize as such simply because, whether or not there is such a reason, we are so constituted that we inevitably, albeit not always successfully, respond to the facts we identify as reasons (2011: 99). Reasons have a hold on us, not because we have a reason to respond to them, but because we are hardwired in such a way that we cannot but respond to them. This somewhat empirical fact about our mental constitution does not require a normative explanation: we in fact respond to reasons independently of whether we should respond to them; our exercise of the capacity of reason is automatic (2005b: 12). In certain circumstances, we may have no reason to use the capacity at all, while in others we may have a reason to use the capacity badly (2005b: 11). Hence, there is no conclusive or decisive reason to always be rational, i.e., to exercise properly the rational capacity. Hence, rationality understood as proper functioning is not normative.

The last conception of rationality I will consider is that of rationality as a virtue. Jonathan Dancy remarks: "Even if there is a lack of reasons suited to generate rational requirements, it might be that rationality is a virtue. Irrationality could be a kind of defect, even if it is not wrong to be irrational" (2009: 109). He further argues: "Those who do what they take themselves to have most reason to do are behaving virtuously in this respect, at least, even if they have no reason so to act and the features that they take to be reasons would not even be reasons if they were the case" (2009: 109). We find a similar conception in the following passage by Niko Kolodny:

> I think that an account along something like these lines may be correct, although it seems more natural to construe it not in terms of the proper functioning of a system, but instead in terms of a virtue—a substantively good way for a person to be. Some virtues are dispositions to recognize certain kinds of reasons and to respond accordingly. Kindness is a disposition to respond to the needs of others, for example, and justice is a disposition to respond to considerations of fairness. As we have seen, however, rationality cannot be a virtue of this kind. It is not a disposition to act on a special class of reasons. However, rationality might be understood as kind of executive virtue. Executive virtues, like courage and tenacity, are not dispositions to recognize and respond to a special kind of reason. They are, instead, dispositions that help one to execute one's beliefs about one's reasons, whatever they might be, or to execute one's intentions, whether or not one believes there are reasons

> for them. […] Suppose […] that rationality consists in having the attitudes that one believes that one has reason to have. Then rationality seems a kind of executive virtue. It is a disposition to execute one's beliefs about one's reasons for and against one's attitudes. (2005: 553–554)

Dancy and Kolodny both explicitly reject the reason-response conception of rationality, for they maintain that one is rational, not by correctly recognizing and responding to reasons, but by having the attitudes or performing the actions one believes one has (most) reason to have or perform. The correct recognition of, and response to, reasons is irrelevant to being rational inasmuch as one can be disposed to execute one's beliefs about one's reasons, thereby being rational, even if these are the wrong reasons or even if, in fact, they are not reasons at all. Note that Dancy takes the conception of rationality as a virtue to be compatible with the conception of rationality as coherence. He thinks that the notion of a requirement of rationality applies to a requirement like "Do what you believe yourself to have most reason to do," but not to a requirement like "Do what you have most reason to do," which he regards as a requirement of reason (2009: 95–96). He remarks: "Those who act in breach of [the former] requirement, one might say, are at odds with themselves, since they are failing to act in accordance with their own idea of what there is the most reason to do" (2009: 96). As the second passage from Dancy (2009) quoted above makes clear, he takes the connection between the two conceptions of rationality to be that, by complying with structural requirements of rationality, one behaves virtuously or displays a virtue.

With respect to the normativity of rationality, Dancy remarks that if "there are virtues of rationality, there are reasons to approve of those who display those virtues, to try to display them ourselves and to inculcate them in our children," but that "we have not yet been able to isolate those reasons" (2009: 111). He admits that he does not know what reasons there might be to comply with the requirements of rationality and closes his article by remarking that *perhaps* those reasons are internal to rationality. Kolodny points out that it might be argued that "every display of rationality is, in some sense, admirable, even that of someone who is mistaken about what he ought to do. Might this mean that there is at least one reason for him to do what he believes he ought to do: namely, that it would be an admirable display of rationality?" (2005: 546). Kolodny is strongly inclined to answer this question in the negative. For him, there are no reasons to be rational and, hence, the normativity of rationality is merely apparent. He further argues that the apparent normativity of rationality derives from the normativity of reasons, more precisely from the reasons one believes one has.

In sum, first, it seems possible to distinguish four conceptions of rationality: (i) the coherence or structural account, (ii) the reason-response account, (iii) the proper functioning account, and (iv) the virtue account. There is not a clear demarcation between all four conceptions, since one may combine elements of two or more of

them.[3] My taxonomy is mainly intended to underline aspects on which it is useful to focus in an examination of whether the neo-Pyrrhonist is (ir)rational. Second, there is no agreement among theorists of rationality about whether rationality is normative.

10.3 Is the Neo-Pyrrhonist (Ir)rational?

Is the neo-Pyrrhonist rational or irrational according to the distinct conceptions of rationality reviewed in the previous section? Before addressing this question, it should be noted that the neo-Pyrrhonist would lay emphasis on the various entrenched debates among the philosophers who have explored what rationality consists in. Besides the general disagreement between the proponents of the different conceptions of rationality, one finds countless others in the specialist literature: whether structural requirements of rationality take narrow or wide scope, whether such requirements are diachronic or synchronic, whether rationality requires certain states or instead certain processes, whether rationality consists in correctly responding to reasons or rather to beliefs about reasons, whether normative reasons are objective, etc. These are disagreements that take place either between proponents of the distinct accounts of rationality or within each camp. Thus, the neo-Pyrrhonist's initial reaction when considering the question of the rationality or irrationality of his skeptical stance is to point out that non-skeptics should probably first resolve their disagreements. For it might be the case that his stance is irrational according to some conceptions of rationality, but rational according to others. Note that, even if the proponents of the distinct accounts of rationality agreed that the neo-Pyrrhonist's stance is irrational, the various disagreements mentioned above would not be irrelevant. For they would still disagree about the reason why the neo-Pyrrhonist's stance is to be deemed irrational. From his point of view, the fact that dogmatists propose different theories of rationality can be taken as an indication that the notion of rationality is problematic, and that a suspensive attitude towards what rationality consists in might be called for. As long as the various disagreements concerning rationality remain unresolved, a neo-Pyrrhonian stance may be a live option. It might still be argued that, even if we suspended judgment about which of the distinct accounts of rationality is to be preferred, it would be a serious problem for the neo-Pyrrhonist if dogmatists agreed that his stance is irrational. In reply, it should be remarked that, even if his stance were indeed irrational, this would be a problem

[3] Ralph Wedgwood (2017) conceives of rationality as a virtue that is exhibited by a person when his attitudes fit together in a coherent way. Like Dancy, then, Wedgwood takes the conception of rationality as a virtue to be related to the conception of rationality as coherence. He also remarks that "the uses of the term 'rational'" with which he is concerned "express a normative concept—specifically, a concept that refers to the *proper* use of one's faculties of thinking and reasoning" (2017: 8). His view thus seems to be related as well to the conception of rationality as proper functioning. What about the reason-response account of rationality? Wedgwood (2017: 11–12) thinks that the contrast between rationality-as-coherence and rationality-as-reasons-responsiveness is actually a distinction without a difference. Lastly, Wedgwood takes rationality to be normative.

if and only if rationality were normative—i.e., if and only if there were conclusive, decisive, or binding reasons to be rational—a question about which dogmatists disagree and the neo-Pyrrhonist suspends judgment (on which more below).

Setting aside the problem posed by the lack of agreement among theorists of rationality, examining the neo-Pyrrhonist's stance from the vantage point of each of the four accounts of rationality distinguished in the preceding section will make it possible to gain a better understanding of his stance.

Is the neo-Pyrrhonist (ir)rational according to the coherence account of rationality? To answer this question, we may focus on the law of non-contradiction (LNC). In Chap. 5, I referred to the doxastic version of the LNC, which can be interpreted either descriptively or normatively. If interpreted normatively, it corresponds to the structural requirement of rationality called Belief Consistency in the preceding section: S is rationally required not to believe both that p and that $\neg p$. As we also saw in Chap. 5, in his philosophical inquiries and in his daily life the Pyrrhonist observes the LNC, but the version he observes is the deflationary, psychological version, which was formulated thus:

> *Psychological Version*
>
> Up to now I have, as a matter of psychological fact, been unable to assent to two or more conflicting appearances at the same time.

It seems difficult to regard the psychological version as a rational requirement. In fact, I formulated this version because the Pyrrhonist refrains from saying that he observes structural requirements of rationality such as the one expressed by the doxastic version of the LNC, the reason being that he suspends judgment about whether they are true. Note, however, that his exercise of his rational faculty seems, at least so far, to be largely in accord with such requirements. What I mean is that, if proponents of the coherence account of rationality looked at the neo-Pyrrhonist's combinations of attitudes, they would find significant similarities with the combinations of attitudes of any non-skeptic who conforms to the structural requirements of rationality and takes them to be true: at least up to now, the neo-Pyrrhonist does not assent to conflicting appearance-statements, he reasons by *modus ponens* and *modus tollens*, etc. A crucial difference is, of course, that the neo-Pyrrhonist does not describe as beliefs the attitudes that the structural requirements formulated in the preceding section describe as such. But the important point is that his combinations of attitudes do not seem to be irrational.

What about the reason-response account? If rationality consists in correctly responding to reasons, it could be argued that the neo-Pyrrhonist is *prima facie* rational inasmuch as, when the reasons pro and con p strike him as equipollent, he suspends judgment about whether p is the case, which is the rationally required way to respond when faced with equipollent reasons. But things are more complex. Two crucial questions are whether the neo-Pyrrhonist believes that the reasons pro and con p are equipollent in an objective sense, and whether he believes that suspension is the correct response to equipollence. It should be clear by now that the answer to both questions is "no." First, he does not rank the opposing reasons on an objective scale of epistemic strength: he does not affirm (or deny) that the reasons that have

been adduced for and against *p* are really equipollent, but merely reports that they strike him that way (see *PH* I 196, quoted in Chap. 2). Second, as we saw in Chaps. 5 and 9, suspending judgment is the way he reacts when confronted with opposing reasons that strike him as equipollent, but he refrains from affirming that, in so doing, he is correctly responding to those reasons. So, is the neo-Pyrrhonist's stance rational from the vantage point of the reason-response account of rationality? It depends. On the one hand, if Pyrrhonian suspension can be deemed rational provided the neo-Pyrrhonist believes both that the reasons for and against *p* are really equipollent and that suspension is the correct response to the reasons available to him, then his stance cannot be considered rational. On the other hand, it might be argued that, insofar as with respect to all the issues the neo-Pyrrhonist has so far investigated it appears to him that the conflicting reasons balance out, the reasons epistemically available to him support across-the-board suspension. The proponent of the reason-response account would probably note that, although in certain cases the outcome of weighing the reasons for and against *p* is suspension, in most cases the epistemically accessible reasons do favor one of the competing views on *p*, which means that in most cases the neo-Pyrrhonist fails to correctly respond to those reasons and, hence, to be rational. The neo-Pyrrhonist could reply that, even though the majority of non-skeptics claim that most of the time the available reasons support belief in one of the competing views on *p*, when they get down to concrete cases, they disagree about which view is correct. If that is so, and given that they believe that they cannot all be right, they must accept that, with regard to the many issues about which they disagree, each one of them incorrectly responds to the available reasons much more frequently than they think. The neo-Pyrrhonist would then remark that, granting for the sake of argument that his response to the available reasons is correct only rarely, his performance does not seem to be worse than that of non-skeptics and, hence, that he does not seem to be more irrational than they are.

The third conception of rationality discussed in the previous section is that according to which rationality consists in proper functioning. Do the neo-Pyrrhonist's cognitive capacities function properly? It might be argued that they do if one takes his suspension to be the correct response to the conflicting reasons available to him, and if one thinks that, in suspending judgment, he conforms to the requirement of rationality according to which it is rationally required to suspend judgment about *p* whenever one takes there to be no reason to believe either *p* or ¬*p*. Still, it might be objected that he is irrational if one focuses on Raz's claim that rational capacities are "those capacities that are involved in discerning which features in the world merit a response, and how to respond to them" (2005a: 25). If one thinks that, in most cases, the neo-Pyrrhonist's assessment of the reasons for the conflicting views on *p* is faulty or biased because those reasons are not actually equipollent, then one can claim that he is irrational in that he is unable to correctly use his rational powers to discern what the correct response to those reasons is. As we saw in the previous section, Raz remarks that one may be functioning properly even when one fails to conform to reasons that apply to us, provided the failure is due to non-culpable mistakes or ignorance. Given that the neo-Pyrrhonist suspends judgment about all the matters he has so far investigated, it is unlikely that in each

case he has made a non-culpable mistake or acted out of excusable ignorance. In reply, the neo-Pyrrhonist could argue that, given the many disagreements that exist among non-skeptics and assuming that not all of the disagreeing parties can be right, the majority of them must be making a defective use of their rational powers when examining most of the disputed issues. Also, as we saw in Chap. 8, a wide range of experimental studies provide evidence that the influence of motivational and cognitive biases is extensive, even among smart and well-trained philosophers. Hence, if the neo-Pyrrhonist manifests a form of malfunctioning, it seems that he is in good company inasmuch as the rational capacities of his rivals do not seem to be functioning better than his own rational capacities when it comes to the examination of controversial issues. If so, then it is far from clear that he is more irrational than they are.

What about the conception of rationality as a virtue? If rationality is an executive virtue, then it may be argued that the neo-Pyrrhonist displays such a virtue by executing not his beliefs but rather his appearances about his reasons for and against certain attitudes. If it appears to him both that the arguments for and against p are equipollent and that, in the face of equipollence, suspension rather than belief is the attitude towards p one has reason to have, then he behaves virtuously by suspending judgment. For insofar as he has the attitude that is in line with the way things appear to him, he is displaying a virtue even if others do not share his appearances and even if he actually has no reason to suspend judgment. The neo-Pyrrhonist does not of course regard himself as virtuous or as exhibiting dispositions that are good for a person to have. And although *qua* being equipped with reason it appears to him that suspension is the attitude he has reason to have, he does not suspend judgment because he believes he is rationally required to do so, but rather because he feels compelled to do so—as noted several times, suspension is a compulsory response, the enforced psychological effect of being confronted with conflicting arguments that strike one as equipollent. Now, if the possession of some or all of the beliefs the neo-Pyrrhonist lacks are required to display the virtue of rationality, then he cannot actually be considered rational.

What does the neo-Pyrrhonist have to say about the normativity of rationality? Here again, he would first lay emphasis on the disagreement between those who believe that there are conclusive, decisive, or binding reasons to comply with rational requirements and those who deny this. He would also stress that not even proponents of the same conception of rationality are always in agreement about whether rationality is normative. At least for the time being, this disagreement appears unresolvable to him and so he suspends judgment on the matter. But what about Kiesewetter's criticism argument? Does the neo-Pyrrhonist not criticize dogmatists constantly? Does this not imply that he believes that there are decisive reasons to respond in certain ways? The neo-Pyrrhonist's reply is by now quite obvious: he does criticize dogmatists, but in so doing he proceeds dialectically. This means that he can criticize a given dogmatist using the standards the latter claims to be authoritative or binding. To make this clearer, it may be worth looking at some of the considerations Kolodny makes in explaining the seeming normativity of rationality. He entertains the possibility that all requirements of rationality ultimately derive from

two core ones, namely, that according to which if one believes to have conclusive reason to have a given attitude, then one is rationally required to have that attitude (C+), and that according to which if one believes to lack sufficient reason to have an attitude, then one is rationally required not to have that attitude (C–). He then points out:

> When we tell someone, in the register of advice, rather than that of appraisal, that he ought rationally to have attitude *A*, or that it would be irrational of him not to have it, suppose that we are simply pointing out that he satisfies the antecedent of C+. We are making the descriptive, psychological claim that he believes that he has conclusive reason for the attitude. We are telling him […] that *from his point of view*, or *as it seems to him*, he has conclusive reason to have the attitude. Thus, when we tell him that he 'ought rationally' to have attitude *A*, we are not ourselves offering him a reason to have *A*. How, then, are we advising him to have *A*? By drawing his attention to a reason for *A* that *he believes* he has. Thus, a second-person charge of irrationality, 'But you ought to believe it! It would be irrational of you not to!' says, in effect: 'Look: from *your* point of view, you have reason to believe it!' Likewise, a third-person charge of irrationality, 'He ought to believe that *p*. It would be irrational of him not to,' says, in effect, 'From *his* point of view, he ought to believe that *p*'. (2005: 557)

Similarly, when in his inquiries the neo-Pyrrhonist criticizes someone for not adopting a given attitude, he is not himself offering a reason to adopt it. Rather, he is working with his rival's own beliefs about the reason the latter has to adopt that attitude. But what is the point of the neo-Pyrrhonist's criticisms if he is not doxastically committed to the normativity of the requirements of rationality? Does his dialectical use of rational requirements not presuppose at least that he believes that one should abide by the rational requirements one claims to endorse? In reply, the neo-Pyrrhonist points out that (i) he is making a dialectical use of the higher-order view that one should comply with the requirements of rationality one claims to endorse, and that (ii) he is also following a view that appears psychologically persuasive to him on account of the influence of certain factors, such as his upbringing, education, and professional training. Proceeding thus is, as we saw in Chap. 2, his way of carrying out his inquiries: he cannot rule out the possibility that the higher-order view in question as well as the rational requirements proposed by dogmatists will make it possible to discover the truth—if any there is. To the extent that he remains engaged in truth-directed inquiry, he works with all the tools at his disposal, including the views that others claim to be correct and his own appearances.

10.4 LNC, *Modus Ponens*, and *Modus Tollens*

As noted in Chap. 5, the Pyrrhonist refrains from endorsing the LNC. There are at least two reasons for this. First, he does not believe that he is entitled to infer that the LNC is true from the fact that he and others feel compelled to observe it in their own thinking and discourse. Sextus is not explicit about this, but I think it accords well with, e.g., his remarks in the Ten Modes to the effect that the fact that humans perceive things a certain way does not entail that they are that way. If you do not agree with me, then simply take this first reason as my own development of the

Pyrrhonian stance. Second, faced with the disagreement between those who endorse the LNC and those who reject it, the Pyrrhonist finds himself unable to decide between them, and so feels compelled to suspend his judgment.

In connection with the second reason, a contemporary Pyrrhonist would find further grounds for suspending judgment about the truth of the LNC in the development of paraconsistent logic since the second half of the twentieth century. A paraconsistent logic is one that is not explosive, i.e., one in which it is not the case that everything is entailed by, or follows from, a contradiction.[4] A view adopted by some paraconsistent logicians is *dialetheism*, according to which there are some *dialetheias*, i.e., true contradictions. The terms 'dialetheism' and 'dialetheia' were coined by Graham Priest and Richard Routley in the early 1980s. Based on its etymology (di- + ἀλήθεια), 'dialetheia' means 'double truth': both a sentence and its negation are to be accepted as true.[5] The clearest examples of dialetheias are the logical paradoxes, i.e., the paradoxes of self-reference, such as the famous Liar Paradox, which arises with sentences of the form "This sentence is false" or "This sentence is not true": if the sentence is true, then it is false (or not true), but if it is false (or not true), then it is true. For Priest, there are no truth value gaps, that is, sentences that are neither true nor false (2006a: 13), and so we must accept that sentences such as the paradoxical sentences are both true and false. He also claims that some dialetheias arise in connection with various kinds of change as well as with legal and moral norms (2006a: chaps. 11–13). Note, in addition, that Otávio Bueno and Newton da Costa (2007) have proposed an account of scientific rationality according to which, if scientific theories are taken to be quasi-true and if the underlying logic is paraconsistent, then it is not irrational to entertain, as scientists frequently do, inconsistent theories. Let me finally remark that A. J. Cotnoir (2018) has examined whether it is possible to use dialetheism and paraconsistency to respond to the objections raised to the divine attributes of omniscience and omnipotence: God is able to know true contradictions or to bring about inconsistent states of affairs. In Cotnoir's view, if a theist made use of the resources of dialetheism and paraconsistent logic, he could show that the paradoxes of the divine attributes are not logically problematic.[6]

The dialetheist's position is not as radical as those of Heraclitus and Protagoras, but it is radical enough: most philosophers and laypersons are uncomfortable with the idea that the LNC may be violated in very specific cases.[7] The (main) reason is

[4] For a basic presentation of paraconsistent logic, see Priest et al. (2018).

[5] For a basic presentation of dialetheism, see Priest et al. (2018), also Horn (2018: sect. 4). For an elaborate presentation and defense of the position, see Priest (2006a, b).

[6] In the history of philosophy, the neo-Pyrrhonist could also appeal to Hegel's view that there are true contradictions or to Nicholas of Cusa's claim that God is *coincidentia oppositorum*. He could as well appeal to Buddhism, if it is indeed the case that—as argued by Deguchi et al. (2008)—some of the contradictions found in Buddhist texts are meant literally and to be accepted as true.

[7] Another difference between Heraclitus and Protagoras, on the one hand, and contemporary dialetheists, on the other, is that the views of the former are clearly metaphysical, whereas the dialetheism of authors such as Kroon (2004) and Mares (2004) is semantic, and Priest (2006a: 299–302) remains for the most part neutral on whether his dialetheism is metaphysical or semantic. Metaphysical dialetheism is the view that "there are things in the world that are inconsistent or that

the common view that everything follows from a contradiction (*ex contradictione sequitur quodlibet*). But this is so only in standard logic, whereas, as noted in the preceding paragraph, in a paraconsistent logic, contradictions do not entail everything (Priest, 2006b: 121–122, 133).

Priest makes some remarks that are relevant to my discussion of the Pyrrhonist's attitude towards the doxastic version of the LNC:

> Many, in fact most, of us believe contradictions. The person who has consistent beliefs is rare. If someone has never found that their beliefs were inconsistent, this probably means that they just have not thought about them long enough […]. It may be suggested that when one discovers that one's beliefs are inconsistent one changes them. *Maybe* so, but this is irrelevant. More to the point, it might be suggested that dialetheism requires us to have not just inconsistent beliefs, but consciously inconsistent beliefs, and that this is impossible: one cannot believe two inconsistent sentences in the same "mental" breath. Again, this is just plain false. The moment one realises that one's beliefs are inconsistent, one does not *ipso facto* cease to believe the inconsistent things: rather, it becomes a problem, and often a very difficult one, of how to revise one's beliefs to produce consistency. This, of course, takes time. (2006a: 96)

As noted in Chap. 5 and again in the previous section, the doxastic version of the LNC may be interpreted descriptively or normatively. If interpreted descriptively, it is the empirical claim that it is psychologically impossible to hold inconsistent beliefs. The Pyrrhonist cannot commit himself to the truth of this view because thinkers such as Heraclitus and Protagoras claim to believe opposite propositions, and he does not feel entitled to reject such a claim as insincere or disingenuous. But Priest makes a stronger claim: most of us, and not merely a few eccentric philosophers, believe contradictions. He seems to have a point inasmuch as in daily life we constantly encounter people who hold inconsistent beliefs, and we ourselves sometimes discover that some of our own beliefs are inconsistent. Those of us with philosophical training are particularly sensitive to the inconsistencies into which those with whom we interact may fall; and when we expose an inconsistency, people do not usually look worried and try to get rid of it, but rather tell us that we are being pedantic or overanalytical. Thus, when confronted with those who affirm that it is psychologically impossible to hold inconsistent beliefs, the neo-Pyrrhonist may point out, following Priest, that most of us actually do so on a regular basis.

Faced with the disagreement between the champions of standard logic, who endorse the universality of the LNC, and the proponents of dialetheism, the neo-Pyrrhonist is psychologically constrained to suspend judgment because he finds the competing views equally strong. Part of the significance of that disagreement lies in the fact that, while contemporary philosophers might look at the views of Heraclitus and Protagoras with contempt, regarding them as unsophisticated or primitive thinkers whom we have no reason to take seriously, it seems much more difficult to

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it is possible for there to be inconsistencies," whereas semantic dialetheism is the view that "there are no inconsistent things but that inconsistencies arise (or may arise) because of the relationship between language and the world" (Mares, 2004: 265).

underestimate in the same way the elaborate views of the skilled logicians who endorse dialetheism.

The debate between classical and dialetheic logicians could be interpreted as a disagreement between (i) those who claim that one is rationally required not to hold inconsistent beliefs because there is a tension between these beliefs, that is, because holding inconsistent beliefs violates the requirement of Belief Consistency, and (ii) those who claim that the only (or at least the main) tension that must be avoided is that between one's beliefs and one's evidence, and hence that, if in a certain number of cases one's evidence supports holding inconsistent beliefs, then one should hold such beliefs inasmuch as, in so doing, one is correctly responding to one's reasons. Thinkers such as Heraclitus and Protagoras could argue that their views result from correctly responding to their evidence, and hence to their reasons: objects strike them as having opposite properties. Priest, too, seems to understand rationality mainly in terms of the correct response to the available evidence or the available reasons, and he maintains that an inconsistency can be supported by overwhelming evidence or by good reasons, which means that the inconsistency is rationally acceptable or that in certain cases rationality requires inconsistency (2006a: 100–102; 2006b: 125–130, 132–135). Conceived of in the above way, the disagreement in question can be regarded as a dispute between the proponents of two of the accounts of rationality reviewed in Sect. 10.2: the coherence account and the reason-response account. Once again, the neo-Pyrrhonist will ask dogmatists how such a dispute is supposed to be settled in a non-question-begging manner. If they are unable to provide an agreed-upon answer, he will ask them what, from their own point of view, he is supposed to do except suspend judgment about what the correct account of rationality is and, hence, about what rationality requires.

In Chap. 5, I argued that the Pyrrhonist suspends judgment not only about the truth of the LNC, but also about the logical validity of the arguments by means of which he conducts his philosophical inquiries. In the case of the LNC, he can mention both past thinkers who reject the LNC and contemporary thinkers who claim that some contradictions are true. The fact that there were, and still are, dogmatists who (partially) reject the LNC reinforces the neo-Pyrrhonist's stance inasmuch as he can point to actual disagreements about its truth—disagreements he has so far been unable to resolve. What about the logical forms of arguments? Their case is similar to that of the LNC at least as far as *modus ponens* and *modus tollens* are concerned: some contemporary philosophers have mounted cases against their universal validity.

Let us focus on *modus ponens* first. In the mid-1980s, Vann McGee proposed three counterexamples to *modus ponens* that in his view show that "it is not strictly valid; there are occasions on which one has good grounds for believing the premises of an application of modus ponens but yet one is not justified in accepting the conclusion" (1985: 462). Differently put, the examples show that "modus ponens is not an entirely reliable rule of inference. Sometimes the conclusion of an application of modus ponens is something we do not believe and should not believe, even though the premises are propositions we believe very properly" (1985: 463). One of the counterexamples refers to the 1980 US Presidential campaign:

> Opinion polls taken just before the 1980 election showed the Republican Ronald Reagan decisively ahead of the Democrat Jimmy Carter, with the other Republican in the race, John Anderson, a distant third. Those apprised of the poll results believed, with good reason:
>
> > If a Republican wins the election, then if it's not Reagan who wins it will be Anderson.
> > A Republican will win the election.
>
> Yet they did not have reason to believe
>
> > If it's not Reagan who wins, it will be Anderson. (1985: 462)

All of McGee's counterexamples have as their major premise a compound conditional, i.e., a conditional whose consequent is itself a conditional, so that they do not show that *modus ponens* fails when applied to simple conditionals (1985: 464, 468). Also, they "show that the indicative conditional does not satisfy modus ponens," whereas "[i]t is not so easy to test whether the rule is valid for the subjunctive conditional, since we seldom use the subjunctive conditional in situations in which we are confident that the antecedent is true" (1985: 466).

As Christian Piller remarks, McGee "pushed philosophical doubt beyond another frontier. His attempt to show that modus ponens is not a valid form of inference—and to show this by help of a counterexample and not by envisaging an evil demon confusing us—is proof of the ingenuity of a philosopher's ability to doubt" (1996: 27). You might think that McGee's rejection of the universal validity of *modus ponens* is just an eccentricity—another one in the long list of philosophical eccentricities—and that the seemingly skeptical implications of his view caused it to be dismissed out of hand. But you would be wrong, for McGee's is not an isolated view. Piller (1996) himself defends McGee's argument against a number of objections and maintains that the theories on the basis of which *modus ponens* could be vindicated against McGee's counterexamples face serious problems. William Lycan (2001: chap. 3) argues that *modus ponens* is not *per se* a valid form of inference on the basis of a number of counterexamples, including McGee's. James Dreier (2009) claims that *modus ponens* is invalid for a certain type of practical conditional. Niko Kolodny and John MacFarlane (2010) question the validity of *modus ponens* for the natural-language indicative conditional on account of several counterexamples, among which are McGee's—although they maintain that this is not as revisionary as it seems because most ordinary reasoning employing *modus ponens* can be vindicated. Matthew Mandelkern (2020) follows others both in distinguishing *modus ponens* as a principle about preservation of truth and as a principle about preservation of full acceptance, and in arguing that McGee's counterexamples show that, in the case of indicative conditionals, *modus ponens* is invalid in the sense that it does not preserve truth but not in the sense that it does not preserve full acceptance. In his view, however, there are counterexamples that reveal that, in the case of subjunctive conditionals, both kinds of *modus ponens* are invalid.

Modus tollens has also been called into question. John Cantwell (2008: 337) contends that both *modus ponens* and *modus tollens* "turn out to be fallacious modes of reasoning when the consequent of a conditional contains a context-sensitive modality." Although their primary focus is *modus ponens*, Kolodny and MacFarlane (2010) also target *modus tollens*. Seth Yalcin (2012) denies the universal validity of

modus tollens on the basis of the following counterexample. There is an urn of 100 marbles, which is a mix of blue and red, big and small: 10 marbles are big and blue, 30 big and red, 50 small and blue, and 10 small and red. Now,

> A marble is selected at random and placed under a cup. This is all the information given about the situation. Against this background, the following claims about the marble under the cup are licensed:
> (P1) If the marble is big, then it's likely red.
> (P2) The marble is not likely red.
> However, from these, the following conclusion does not intuitively follow:
> (C1) The marble is not big.
> But this conclusion would follow, were Modus Tollens (MT) valid. So MT is not generally valid. (2012: 1001–1002)

It is worth noting that, besides mentioning Cantwell (2008) and Kolodny and MacFarlane (2010), Yalcin attributes counterexamples to *modus tollens* to Lewis Carroll (1894), James Forrester (1984), and Frank Veltman (1985).

Here too, then, the neo-Pyrrhonist can appeal to actual disagreements among dogmatists to bolster his case that it is far from clear that the rules of inference should be accepted as universally valid. Even though we make use of them because we are perhaps hardwired to do so, there are a few skilled philosophers who have come up with counterexamples that cast doubt on the universal validity of *modus ponens* and *modus tollens*, which can be regarded as the rules of inference *par excellence*. Faced with the disagreements about the validity of such rules of inference, and being unable to resolve them, the neo-Pyrrhonist feels once again compelled to suspend judgment.

10.5 Conclusion

So, is the neo-Pyrrhonist rational or irrational according to the distinct accounts of rationality defended in the contemporary literature? The answer depends, first, on whether being rational presupposes belief in the truth of structural requirements of rationality or in the correctness of one's responses to the available reasons. If it does, then the neo-Pyrrhonist is irrational inasmuch as he suspends judgment about the truth of requirements such as Belief Consistency and Modus Ponens and does not claim that suspension is the correct response to the reasons he possesses. Second, if being rational presupposes the belief that there is a proper way for our rational powers to function or the belief that a certain kind of executive virtue is of objective value, then the neo-Pyrrhonist is irrational because he holds neither belief. Note, however, that if one focuses on the neo-Pyrrhonist's arguments and attitudes, they seem for the most part to be in line with the requirements of rationality, to accord with the reasons that are available to him, and to exhibit a proper use of his rational powers or an executive virtue. Moreover, his performance does not seem worse than that of any non-skeptic, be it a philosopher or a layperson. For instance, most of us have inconsistent beliefs and the many disagreements in which people are involved

indicate—assuming that not all of them can be right—that they frequently fail to correctly respond to reasons. Both facts seem to show that most people are often irrational despite their commitment to the truth of rational requirements and to the correctness of their responses to the available reasons. Perhaps such a commitment is only a necessary condition for being rational, which means that the neo-Pyrrhonist's situation is in principle worse than that of non-skeptics. I am not sure that this is indeed the case. However that may be, the neo-Pyrrhonist does not care much about being criticized for being irrational, not only because he is used to being treated as a philosophical pariah, but also because it is far from clear that there are any binding reasons to be rational, given the unresolved disagreement about whether rationality is normative. It is this unresolved disagreement and all the others that have been considered in the preceding sections that show that a neo-Pyrrhonian stance on the requirements of rationality and its normativity may be a live philosophical option.

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Chapter 11
Coda

Abstract After summarizing the main conclusions of Chaps. 2 to 10, this final chapter addresses the following two questions. What, if any, is Pyrrhonism's epistemic value, i.e., its value concerning the goals of attaining truth and avoiding error? And what, if any, is its prudential value, i.e., its value concerning the goal of living well or leading a good life?

Keywords Buddhism · Epistemic value · Henri Estienne · Intellectual cowardice · Intellectual humility · Open-mindedness · Prudential value

11.1 Summary

Let me sum up the main conclusions of the preceding chapters. According to my understanding of the skeptical stance, the Pyrrhonist is engaged in an open-minded inquiry into truth. Such an inquiry is to be explained by a suspensive attitude that prevents him from asserting that the truth about the matters under investigation (if any there is) cannot be found, but also by an inquisitive temperament or personality that makes him desire to find answers to the questions that intrigue him. It is this inquisitive temperament or personality that led him to philosophy in the first place and that explains his ongoing engagement in it. If for some reason he abandoned inquiry, he would thereby cease to be a skeptic because Sextus conceives of both suspension of judgment and involvement in inquiry as defining features of the skeptical philosophy.

The Pyrrhonist's argumentative practice is characterized by at least four features. First, it is oppositional because he produces oppositions among arguments in order to assess their strength. Second, he makes a therapeutic use of arguments: he employs arguments that differ in their persuasiveness to cure his dogmatic patients of the distinct degrees of conceit and rashness that afflict them. Such a difference in persuasiveness does not concern the logical and epistemic features of arguments but only their therapeutic effects. Third, his arguments are for the most part dialectical, which means that they are used in an agonistic context and that, when he puts forward an argument to counter one advanced by a dogmatist, he accepts *in propria*

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persona neither the truth of its premises and conclusion nor the validity of its logical form. Fourth, the Pyrrhonist avails himself of arguments in his own truth-directed investigations. These four features coherently relate to each other or, at the very least, are not incompatible. Regarding the arguments used by the Pyrrhonist, it is also crucial to bear in mind that one should distinguish between two kinds of persuasiveness, namely, epistemic and psychological. Although arguments appear equally persuasive to the Pyrrhonist in an epistemic sense, some arguments may appear persuasive to him while others do not, or some arguments may appear more persuasive than others, in a merely psychological sense.

The Pyrrhonist makes an extensive yet detached use of reason and non-doxastically observes the so-called requirements of rationality. He employs his rational faculty because he is naturally, and hence inevitably, capable of thinking. And he complies with such principles as the LNC and such inference rules as *modus ponens* and *modus tollens* because, in his case at least, doing so corresponds to the way his thinking operates. For this reason, such principles and inference rules strike the Pyrrhonist as psychologically rather than epistemically persuasive. He also appeals to rational requirements in his arguments because they are endorsed by his dogmatic opponents. The same applies to the Five Modes of Agrippa: although he makes a merely dialectical use of the requirements on justification underlying those modes, they nonetheless appear psychologically rather than epistemically persuasive to him. Because of all of this, I suggested that the Pyrrhonist is neither a rationalist—inasmuch he is not committed to the epistemic value of reason or to the truth of the requirements of rationality—nor an anti-rationalist—inasmuch as he does not deny the epistemic value of reason or the truth of rational requirements. Rather, Pyrrhonism is perhaps best described as a deflationary rationalism: the Pyrrhonist uses the faculty of reason and observes rational requirements as much as most people, but he is doxastically detached from such a use and such an observation.

Central to my examination of ancient Pyrrhonism has been the phenomenon of disagreement. I argued that the mode from disagreement can induce suspension of judgment all by itself, even though its full force can be deployed when it is used in combination with the Agrippan trilemma. The importance of the mode from disagreement is also seen in the fact that the Pyrrhonist can utilize it against those contemporary epistemologists who claim that the trilemma rests on questionable assumptions, for they hold conflicting views about how the challenge posed by the trilemma is to be met. I also argued that the argument from possible disagreement, which is based upon the awareness of the limits of our current epistemic situation, can be used in a way that makes it compatible with both the definition of skepticism and the skeptic's open-minded inquiry into truth.

As regards the present-day debate on the epistemic significance of disagreement, I first remarked, from a neo-Pyrrhonian perspective, that all the parties to the debate illegitimately take for granted that there is an objective fact of the matter about at least most disputed issues, that there is objective evidence bearing on those issues, and that one can have access to the truth about them on the basis of that evidence. Second, I argued against the steadfast views according to which, in the face of peer disagreement, one can rationally hold one's ground by appealing either to the

alleged fact that one has adequately responded to the first-order evidence bearing on the matter at hand or to the ineliminability of the first-person perspective and the self-trust that comes with it. Third, I claimed that the appeal to personal information as a symmetry breaker is not an effective strategy for resolving disagreements from a first-person perspective because it faces three problems. The first is that both parties to the disagreement can appeal to such information, which seems to indicate that there is a dialectical-cum-epistemic symmetry between them: from my own first-person perspective, the information I gain about the symmetric line of reasoning that my rival employs to downgrade me should make me wonder whether that line of reasoning is as reliable to downgrade him as I think it is. For if he can be wrong despite relying on personal information, what is so special about myself that I cannot be wrong despite relying on the same kind of information? The second problem is that it is far from clear that we are entitled to regard ourselves as reliable judges of our own stream of conscious experience. And the third problem is that a wide range of experimental studies provide evidence that seems to undermine one's confidence in the reliable functioning of one's own cognitive faculties: one's beliefs about the disputed issues may be, unbeknownst to oneself, the product of the influence of epistemically distorting or contaminating factors.

A key question that arises in connection with the debate on the epistemic significance of disagreement is whether Pyrrhonism falls prey to the disagreeing about disagreement argument that has been leveled against conciliationism: when faced with a disagreement with a non-skeptic about the correctness of his stance, the neo-Pyrrhonist should suspend judgment about whether he should suspend judgment, which shows that his stance undermines or defeats itself. He seems able to dodge the bullet insofar as, unlike conciliationists, he regards his suspension as a psychological reaction that, given the way he appears to be evolutionarily hardwired or the way he was educated and professionally trained, is forced on him whenever conflicting arguments strike him as equipollent. The Pyrrhonist does not believe that suspension about whether *p* is the doxastic attitude he is rationally required to adopt when it appears to him that there is no reason to believe either *p* or its negation.

Lastly, given the neo-Pyrrhonist's deflationary rationalism, I argued that, from the perspective of contemporary theories of rationality, he should be regarded as irrational if being rational presupposes the belief that certain rational requirements are true, or that certain responses to available reasons are correct, or that there is a proper way for our rational powers to function, or that a certain kind of executive virtue is of objective value. However, if one focuses on the neo-Pyrrhonist's arguments and attitudes, for the most part they seem to be in line with the requirements of rationality, to accord with the reasons that are available to him, to reflect a proper use of his rational capacities, and to exhibit some sort of executive virtue. Furthermore, his performance does not seem worse than that of any non-skeptic: for instance, most people have inconsistent beliefs and the many disagreements in which they are involved indicate—assuming that at most one of them can be right—that they frequently fail to correctly respond to reasons. I also argued that the neo-Pyrrhonist lays emphasis on the present-day debates about what rationality consists in and whether it is normative, and about the universal applicability or validity of the

LNC, *modus ponens*, and *modus tollens*. For here too we find, as in any other area of philosophical inquiry, entrenched disagreements that for now remain unresolved—or at least that is how they strike the neo-Pyrrhonist.

11.2 Does Pyrrhonism Have Epistemic or Prudential Value?

I would like to conclude this book by addressing two questions. What, if any, is the epistemic value of Pyrrhonism, i.e., its value concerning the goals of attaining truth and avoiding error? And what, if any, is its prudential value, i.e., its value concerning the goal of living well or leading a good life?

The answer to the first question depends in part on whose vantage point one takes and in part on how one interprets the Pyrrhonist's suspension. Let me address this second point first. As noted in Chap. 5, the Pyrrhonist's suspension can be understood either as a rationally required response or as an enforced psychological response. If the Pyrrhonist's reason for suspending judgment when confronted with conflicting views on *p* that strike him as equipollent were a doxastic commitment to investigating the truth about *p* by applying the requirements of rationality, then it could be argued that his stance does have epistemic value. For, first, by refraining from adopting a view on *p* in favor of which he does not have compelling evidence, the Pyrrhonist seeks to avoid error. Second, by remaining engaged in open-minded inquiry, he keeps searching for further evidence that could tip the balance in favor of one of the competing views on *p*, which would bring him closer to the truth about whether *p*. If, by contrast, the psychological interpretation of suspension were correct, it could be argued that Pyrrhonism does not have much to offer in terms of epistemic value. For, although the Pyrrhonist suspends judgment when confronted with arguments pro and con *p* that strike him as equipollent, he refrains from making assertions about whether those arguments are really equipollent or about whether suspension is the correct response to equipollent disagreement. Also, although he does not discount the possibility that his suspension makes it possible to avoid error, he does not affirm that this is indeed the case or that the avoidance of error is one of his reasons for suspending judgment. Lastly, although he refrains from affirming that the investigation of truth is doomed to failure and does not exclude the possibility that his ongoing inquiry will make it possible to find the truth about the matters under investigation, he makes no assertions about whether there is a truth about those matters, about whether the manner in which he carries out his inquiry is the correct way to search for truth, or about whether knowing the truth is of objective value.

I think, however, that it is a mistake to claim that Pyrrhonism has no epistemic value if the psychological interpretation of suspension is correct, a mistake that brings me to the first point mentioned above. For, even if the Pyrrhonist himself refrains from affirming (or denying) the epistemic value of his suspension, this does not mean that it lacks epistemic value from the vantage point of those non-skeptics who are committed to the requirement of rationality according to which one should

suspend judgment when confronted with a dispute that one is unable to settle. From that vantage point, it could be argued that the epistemic value of Pyrrhonian suspension lies in that it encourages or promotes the intellectual virtues of caution, humility, and open-mindedness, in the following two respects.

First, the Pyrrhonist's suspension is a recognition of his inability to resolve the disagreements he has examined. He lacks his rivals' overconfidence in the correctness of their own opinions and the reliability of their cognitive faculties. As we saw, Sextus describes as arrogance, rashness, and self-satisfaction the attitudes of his rivals because they hold fast to their views on *p* without taking careful account of rival views on *p* or even despite acknowledging the existence of widespread and entrenched disagreement over whether *p*. One could take the Pyrrhonian attitude to be a good antidote to the contaminating influence of motivational and cognitive biases that make us jump to conclusions or make rash decisions.

Second, Pyrrhonian investigation is characterized by open-mindedness because the Pyrrhonist does not affirm (or deny) that the disagreements he has so far examined are unresolvable in themselves, but rather continues the inquiry into the disputed matters. In other words, the Pyrrhonist's past failure to discover the truth about those matters (if any there is) does not lead him to affirm that the search for truth is doomed to failure. For, given his meta-agnosticism, he cannot rule out the possibility that, through further investigation, he will discover new evidence and arguments that will make it possible to resolve the disagreements. By challenging ossified views that are widely accepted, the Pyrrhonian inquirer encourages us to reexamine them or to come up with previously unconceived alternatives.

Some people—probably most—will nonetheless regard the Pyrrhonist's across-the-board suspension as lacking any real epistemic value because it pushes intellectual caution and humility to the limit. They will argue that the Pyrrhonist actually manifests the vice of intellectual cowardice. For, although there are cases in which suspension is indeed rationally required by the equal strength of the evidence and arguments in favor of each of the conflicting views on the matter at hand, in most cases we do have strong reasons to prefer one of the views to the other(s). For this reason, they will also argue that the Pyrrhonist is intellectually dishonest when he remarks that, in all the disagreements he has so far considered, the competing views have struck him as equally persuasive. In response, it should be remarked that, aside from the fact that the objectors' own experience is different from the Pyrrhonist's, there seems to be no reason to suspect that the latter is not sincere or truthful when reporting on what has happened to him up to this point. For it may indeed be the case that the Pyrrhonist has found himself in the state of being at a loss as to how to resolve all the disagreements he has examined up to this point. Hence, I do not think that the objectors can easily maintain that the Pyrrhonist is disingenuous, although they can still hold that, from their own non-skeptical point of view, he is intellectually cowardly or timid.

Someone might argue that, if the Pyrrhonist has no doxastic commitment to the objective value of his stance but only offers a personal testimony on what has so far happened to him, then his whole enterprise will look pointless and he will hardly

win new supporters. In reply, let me make two sets of remarks, with which I also intend to address the question of whether Pyrrhonism has any prudential value.

First, even though the absence of assertions may lead many to reject Sextus's writings out of hand, nothing necessarily precludes one from finding them philosophically challenging and intriguing. For it is one thing how Sextus intends what he writes to be interpreted and quite another how his readers react to his writings or what use they can make of his writings. For instance, someone may believe that some of Sextus's arguments are sound and have significant philosophical implications. Also, even if one rejects his stance as too radical, one may still find it philosophically stimulating in that it invites one to consider more carefully problems concerning knowledge, justification, inquiry, disagreement, rationality, and action. This in fact explains, for example, why quite a number of contemporary epistemologists have engaged with the justificatory challenges posed by the Modes of Agrippa. To illustrate my point, let me refer to Henri Estienne's experience with Pyrrhonism as described in the preface to his Latin translation of *Pyrrhonian Outlines* published in 1562.[1] In an autobiographical story of the genesis of the translation, he tells us that, while afflicted by a quartan fever that was caused by an immoderate study of letters and that made him hate the very sight of books, he stumbled upon an incomplete and hasty translation of the main principles of Pyrrhonism that he had made some time before. Its first reading immediately made him laugh—subsequent readings having the same effect—which in turn enabled him to overcome his exhaustion and reconciled him with the study of letters. By ridiculing the doctrines of the dogmatic authors the reading of whose works required so much intellectual effort, Sextus's book had a therapeutic effect on Estienne. But, in the latter's view, Pyrrhonism may also be beneficial to the dogmatists themselves inasmuch as it can render them humble by attacking the impudence and rashness of their assertions, and by enabling them to accept that the only truth is that of Revelation. By adopting such a fideistic stance, Estienne took Pyrrhonism to be a remedy not only for the aversion to the study of letters people may experience after reading the dogmatists' works, but also for the disease of impiety that affects the latter. Given such a twofold therapeutic efficacy, Estienne decided to make *Pyrrhonian Outlines* available to those with no knowledge of Greek. Even though he recognizes the curative effect of Pyrrhonism, he cautions us against abusing the skeptical critical attitude by calling into question not only the erroneous things said by the dogmatists but also those that are rightly said; and despite observing at the outset that he has metamorphosed into a skeptic, he later remarks that he is not himself one and does not intend others to become skeptics. Although Estienne makes clear the fictive character of his autobiographical story, the benefits he found in a certain application of Pyrrhonism are to be taken seriously. Sextus would of course reject a fideistic use of Pyrrhonism on the grounds that those who make such a use hold metaphysical and religious views. But the issue under consideration is whether Pyrrhonism could be of epistemic or prudential value to someone who is not a full-blown Pyrrhonist, and hence who

[1] I have used the complete French translation of the preface in Naya (2001).

eschews some of his beliefs while retaining others. In general, the fideistic use made of Pyrrhonism in Renaissance and modern philosophy is a clear example of the epistemic or prudential value it may have for non-skeptics.

Second, it might well occur that some will identify with Sextus's autobiographical report of his own experience or will be deeply influenced by it. For example, a scholar in Greek and Buddhist philosophy once told me that for him the reading of Sextus's writings prompted the experience of "being blissful," in much the same way as did the reading of certain Buddhist texts. Similarly, several years ago, a professor of veterinary medicine told me in writing that, when he first saw The Ten Oxherding Pictures from the Buddhist tradition, he was moved in a way he could not put into words. Pyrrhonism later provided him with those words. Moreover, I was recently contacted by a Zen practitioner who created "The Modern Pyrrhonism Movement" and who wrote a non-academic book on Pyrrhonism in which he intends to explain how modern readers can apply the Pyrrhonian practice—which he regards as strikingly similar to the Buddhist practice—to everyday life to achieve inner peace. Lastly, I have been reading Sextus and been interested in Pyrrhonism as a philosophy for more than twenty years now. Unfortunately, I cannot say that I have experienced something close to "bliss" by reading his texts—such a kind of experience is entirely foreign to me perhaps because it is incompatible with my psychological constitution. What I can say is that I still find this form of skepticism captivating and thought-provoking. This is due to the fact that I identify both with the Pyrrhonist's experience of being at a loss as to how to resolve the entrenched and longstanding disagreements we encounter in philosophy and everyday life, and with his experience of finding oneself, whenever one pushes the application of rational requirements to the limit, in a situation of *aporia* in which such requirements end up undermining themselves or coming into conflict with one another.

You may still think that Sextus is not offering much, and you are of course free to think so. I will not be offended if you return this book to the library shelf convinced that you should have picked another one, or if you try to sell your copy online, or if you write an unfavorable review. But just keep in mind that others may disagree: the brand of Pyrrhonism presented in Sextus's extant writings played an important part in the philosophical scene of the Imperial era, had a tremendous impact on Renaissance and modern philosophy, and continues to be a topic of lively discussion among both scholars of ancient philosophy and analytic epistemologists. If you have read this book through to the end, then after all you, too, think that Pyrrhonism is a philosophy worth exploring.

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